

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Toldot

3 Kislev 5773/November 17, 2012

Vol.4 Num. 9

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The Jig is Up

Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt

Immediately after introducing us to Yaakov and Esav, the Torah presents tension in the family, and this serves as a backdrop for the stories to follow: "Yitzchak loved Esav, because he was a hunter also with his mouth (*tzayid b'fiv*), but Rivkah loved Yaakov." (Bereishit 25:28) Although the description *tzayid b'fiv* (lit. there were trappings in his mouth) is subject to different interpretations, one thing is clear: whereas Rivkah's love for Yaakov stemmed from a pure and simple admiration for his very identity, Yitzchak's favouring of Esav was due to some external behaviour, as a "love dependent on something." (Avot 5:16)

Though the writings of chazal elaborate on this theme at length, the Torah text itself provides us with ample evidence that Esav was not truly worthy of his father's favour. At the age of forty, Esav took two wives from the people of Cheit, a group who had already given our forefather Avraham difficulty in the past (see Bereishit 23 with commentaries). These women were spiritually defiant towards their new in-laws (Bereishit 26:35), and Esav's identification with them should have served as the clearest indication to Yitzchak that his legacy could not continue through this firstborn son. Nevertheless, "the trappings in his mouth" kept Yitzchak

from that realization; he had been deceived concerning a matter of tremendous consequence.

In light of her actions later in our parshah, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch contends that Rivkah must have expended great efforts earlier in life to show her husband the truth, while maintaining peace in what could have been a rather dysfunctional family. Despite those efforts, Yitzchak's mind would not be changed. To him, Esav was his loyal son and a worthy descendant of the chosen nation; no charges of deception would convince him otherwise. How then, was Rivkah to fend off disaster?

Noting the conceptual absurdity of "stealing away" a blessing (much less relying upon a subterfuge that was bound to be discovered upon Esav's return), Rabbi Hirsch suggests that Rivkah was not trying to swap blessings. Rather, Rivkah here attempted to win over Yitzchak, so that he would give the blessings to Yaakov of his own free will. With Yaakov as her proxy, Rivkah demonstrated to Yitzchak a truth that was perhaps too hard for him to recognize on his own – that he was capable of being fooled, and he was not immune to deceit and bias. In a most elaborate and dramatic way, Rivkah proved to her husband that his

choicest son was the wrong choice: if the innocent and simple son could fool his father with mere goatskins, all the more so the cunning hunter could do so with lies and pretences.

Upon Esav's entrance, Rivkah's ruse became apparent. "A very great terror seized Yitzchak, and he said: Who then, is the one who hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate from all of it before you came and I blessed him?" (Bereishit 27:33) The horror and pain this realization brought upon Yitzchak – that his approach to parenting Esav had been misguided – was immense. Nevertheless, being confronted with a truth that had been denied for so long, Yitzchak displayed great emotional strength in conceding that Rivkah was right. In just a few short moments, Yitzchak connected the dots and declared, this time willfully, that Yaakov was to continue his legacy; the perplexing declaration, "Indeed, he will be blessed" (*ibid.*), is Yitzchak's ultimate confirmation that he received Rivkah's message loud and clear.

What are we to learn from this episode? Perhaps we often make the same mistake as Yitzchak seems to commit, presuming that our social awareness and intellects are infallible. Notoriously known as a "stiff-necked people" (Shemot 32:9), our approach to life, our judgements of others and our opinions can indeed be impervious to change. Despite living in an information age, it is too easy in today's world to be "openly insular", learning Torah, reading editorials and absorbing messages of every sort – so long as we are confident that these confirm what we already feel and know. To be sure, our own critical eye and thoughtful analysis are always necessary, but these must come together with an openness to other perspectives and an acceptance that things are not always as we see them.

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**CONTEMPORARY HALACHAH IN MODERN ISRAEL
CONTINUES SUNDAY EVENING:
"INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION IN SYRIA"
WITH RABBI BARUCH WEINTRAUB
5:15 PM AT CLANTON PARK SYNAGOGUE, MEN
✕
8:30 PM AT 4 TILLINGHAM KEEP, MEN AND WOMEN**

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In our parshah three oaths are mentioned – Esav sells his birthright to Yaakov and swears as part of the process (25:33); G-d reaffirms the oath he has sworn to Avraham (26:3) to give him the land of Yisrael; Avimelech and Yitzchak swear to each other (26:31).

Regarding the second oath, the one made by Hashem, we have no questions; we understand that G-d will, of course, keep His word. But the other oaths require exploration; why did Esav's and Avimelech's vows have any meaning to Yaakov and Yitzchak? Prior to biblical law mandating that we keep our oaths (i.e. Devarim 23:24), what bound people to honour their words, and to expect that others would honour theirs? Keeping one's word is not, seemingly, one of the seven commands given to the sons of Noach.

One could argue that Avraham, his descendants and arguably their entire household kept all of the mitzvot. That would explain the case of Esav's oath, as well as the oath made by Avraham's slave in last week parshah (24:9). Avimelech's oath will still stand out, though, requiring an explanation of the nature of a non-Jew's obligation to keep oaths.

Some contend that this obligation stems from the prohibition against desecrating G-d's name. (Mishneh LaMelech Melachim 10:7) This assumption may be based upon the formulation the Chinuch uses in presenting the prohibition against lying under oath (Mitzvah 30): "He who swears in the great Name, and knows he is lying, is... as though he was

saying there is no truth [i.e. no G-d - BW]" The Chinuch explains that to take an oath means to compare the existence of G-d with the correctness of the fact attested by the oath. Thus, lying under oath is a statement that G-d's existence is untrue, G-d forbid.

A different path is taken by the Avnei Nezer (Yoreh Deah 306). He argues that keeping one's promises and oaths is intuitively ethical ('sevara'), and everything intuitively ethical is mandatory for a Noachide, no less than the seven Noachide laws.

Why is it so clear that lying is intuitively wrong? On a simple level, people who lie to each other undermine society. However, a deeper reason might underlie this approach: Lying, and especially under oath, undermines language. As more and more people lie, language, and words themselves, lose their meaning. Man, the torah tells us (Bereshit 2:7), was created as a 'living soul' (nefesh chayah). Onkelos translates this term to 'a speaking soul' (ruach memallela). Speaking is part of what make us human – part of G-d's image within us. So it is that one must always keep his word, as part of his basic identity as a human being, and so live up to his Divinely granted identity.

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Hitoriri: Jewish Spirituality The Faith of Yitzchak Hillel Horovitz

המדרש מספר לנו על הדימיון הרב בין יצחק ואברהם (מדרש הגדול כ"ו, א) "בוא וראה שכל מה שאירע לאברהם אירע ליצחק. אברהם גלה ויצחק גלה. אברהם נסתקפו על אשתו ויצחק נסתקפו על אשתו. אברהם קנאו בו פלשתים ויצחק כך. אברהם הוליד לבסוף ויצחק כך. אברהם יצא ממנו צדיק ורשע ויצחק כך. אברהם היה רעב בימיו ויצחק כך, שנאמר: 'ויהי רעב בארץ'."

אחד הדברים בהם מושווה יצחק לאברהם הוא בכך שהיה צריך "להחביא" את אשתו, אברהם בבואו למצרים וגרר, ויצחק בבואו לגרר. עיון מדוקדק יותר יגלה כי יש הבדל גדול ביניהם. אצל אברהם, נלקחה שרה אל המלך בשתי הפעמים ואילו אצל יצחק נמנעה התקלה מתחילה. מה גרם לכך שרבקה לא נלקחה?

כאשר אברהם (בראשית י"ב, י"ב) מגיע למצרים הוא מודיע לשרה כי עליה להציג את עצמה כאחותו: "אִמְרִי נָא אַחֲתִי אֶתְּ לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לִי בְעֵינֵיךָ וְחִיתָה נַפְשִׁי בְגִלְדְךָ." גם בלכתו לגרר (בראשית כ'), הוא אומר לשרה שתגיד כי היא אחותו: "וַיֹּאמֶר אֶבְרָהָם אֶל שָׂרָה אֵשֶׁתוֹ אַחֲתִי הִיא." אברהם יוזם את המהלך בו שרה תציג את עצמה כאחותו. יצחק לעומת זאת נוקט בגישה אחרת: "וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ אֲנָשֵׁי הַמֶּקוֹם לְאֵשֶׁתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אַחֲתִי הִיא כִּי יָרָא לֹא מֵר אֵשֶׁתִּי..." (בראשית כ"ו, ז'). יצחק לא מודיע לאנשי גרר דבר אלא מחכה עד שיישאלו אותו ורק אז מציג את רבקה כאחותו.

יצחק למעשה נוהג במידה רבה יותר של בטחון. אברהם מחליט מתחילה כי הוא יעמוד בפני בעיה ועל כן עליו להתמודד איתה אולם יצחק מאמין כי הקב"ה יעזור לו ואולי לא יהיה שום צורך בהצגת רבקה כאשתו, ייתכן כי הבעיה לא תתעורר כלל. למעשה הדבר מתברר כמה שמציל את רבקה, אנשי גרר שראו את יצחק ורבקה מתנהגים כבעל ואישה, הופתעו לשמוע כי הם אחים, משום כך נוצר מצב בו אבימלך משקיף בעד החלון וכך הוא יכל לגלות שאכן יצחק ורבקה נשואים, ובכך למעשה נמנעה לקיחתה של רבקה.

יצחק אבינו מלמד אותנו על משמעותה של מידת הבטחון, עלינו לסמוך על הקב"ה שיעזרו בעת צרה, יצחק לא סומך על הנס, אך גם מראה לנו את אמונתו הגדולה אשר בסופו של דבר גם מצילה את רבקה.

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613 Mitzvot: #216-223, 592-593

A Good Heart

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

We generally perceive tzedakah as a practical mitzvah, designed to aid the indigent within society. So it is that the Torah instructs a farmer to engage philanthropically on several levels: To leave the corner (*peah*) of his field or grapevine for the needy and not take it for himself (#216-217, 220-221), to abandon grain or grapes which he dropped (*leket*) during the harvest (#218-219, 222-223), and to leave the grain he missed (*shichichah*) during the harvest (#592-593).

Sefer haChinuch outlines an additional, spiritual dimension in

these practical mitzvot of tzedakah. We are meant to be more than agents of assistance; we are meant to develop a nature which is satisfied with what it receives, and which is eager to share with others. A person who collects all of his harvest, hunting after every kernel to store it away, is never satisfied; there is no quota for his pleasure. A person who declares, "I have reached my threshold," trains himself to view his needs as fulfilled and to rejoice in his lot.

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Torah in Translation**Yaakov and Esav****Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik****Beit haLevi, Parshat Vayishlach****Translated by Yair Manas**

[In Bereishit 32:12, Yaakov prays, "Please save from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav."] Since Yaakov only had one brother, Esav, why did he need to say, "From the hands of Esav"? Saying "my brother" already clarified his request!...

We can explain that Yaakov, aware that Esav was coming to greet him, understood that he could not escape from one of two possibilities: either Esav would attack him and want to kill him, or Esav would be satisfied and return from his anger, and wish to dwell with Yaakov in serenity and unity. Yaakov feared both of these scenarios, for even goodness and love from Esav would be bad for Yaakov... He didn't want Esav as a brother or as Esav, and he asked G-d to save him from both of these hands...

All of the forefathers' actions are signs for their children. In Esav's exile, too, he will act in the same two ways with the Jewish people as he sought to do with Yaakov. In the beginning of the exile, Esav will enact terrible decrees, destruction and suffering, and will fight the Jewish people and seek to destroy them, and G-d in His mercy will not abandon them. Finally, Esav will say that he wishes to dwell serenely with Yaakov, and his intent in doing this will be to distance the Jewish people from serving G-d, and to push them away from their belief in G-d...

It is like Esav's statement (Bereishit 33:12), "We will travel and go, and I will go opposite you." A midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 78:14) explains that he meant that the two would draw close to each other, and each would abandon a little from his customs, until they became close... They would also accept the good fundamental beliefs of Israel, they would also believe in one Creator and Torah from heaven and reward and punishment, and they would desire that Yaakov give up part of his own, and leave some of his acts of service which relate to the next world ...

This is seen in another midrash (Tana d'vei Elyahu Zuta 14), "You take this world and half the next world, and I will take this world and half the next world." The intent is that you would not be involved exclusively in Torah and mitzvot, but would reduce your service and omit from the mitzvot which create a gap between us, and so you will

Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik (1820-1892) was the grandson of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, who founded the renowned Volozhin yeshiva. He studied in Volozhin from the age of thirteen, until his marriage. Rabbi Soloveitchik was later invited to become a Rosh Yeshiva of the Volozhin yeshiva, but he left after ten years due to incompatibility with the other Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin. Where Rabbi Berlin favoured a traditional approach to Torah study, Rabbi Soloveitchik's approach incorporated new analytical methods.

After leaving Volozhin, Rabbi Soloveitchik became Rabbi of Slutsk, and he served there for about ten years. He published a book of responsa as well as a book of commentary to the Torah, both titled Beit HaLevi. In 1877, he was offered the position of Rabbi of Brisk, and he held that position until his death. He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, who was succeeded in turn by his son, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav). Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, famed Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS, was the great-grandson of, and was named for, Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik.

When the Beit HaLevi passed away, his son Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik said that his father's power to create novel insights was inherited by one student, his ability to analyze was inherited by another student, his sharpness was inherited by a third student, his ability to decide law was inherited by yet another student, but no student was able to take his father's keen ability to provide the basic explanation of a text. (MiPeninei HaRav pg. 209).

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receive this world and half of the next world... Esav didn't say *half* of this world, because he knew that once Yaakov would give up even one mitzvah, he would end up with *all* of this world...

Thus Yaakov first prayed to be saved "from the hand of my brother," and only afterwards "from the hand of Esav." In the first scenario, there is only a physical subjugation. In the second, there are both, a spiritual and a physical subjugation, for all of the good which Esav offers will only be for the one who abandons mitzvot and thereby abandons his life. One who does not desire to benefit, who does not desire to draw close, will remain in his suffering as he was beforehand, and so the suffering will be in both realms.

**This Week in
Israeli History
Kislev 6, 1975
"Zionism=Racism"
R' Mordechai Torczyner**

Tuesday is the 6th of Kislev

For decades, opponents of the State of Israel have challenged her Jewish character; perhaps their greatest success came in November 1975. Building on international condemnation of Israeli ties with apartheid South Africa, a Soviet-backed initiative proposed three resolutions to the UN General Assembly. One promoted a PLO presence at the UN, a second proposed an international body to protect Palestinian Arabs, and the third, Resolution 3379, condemned Zionism as "a form of racism and racial discrimination". This last resolution was passed on 6 Kislev 1975, with 99 nations in favour, 35 opposing, and 32 abstaining.

Israel's ambassador to the UN, Chaim Herzog, noted that the resolution was passed on the anniversary of Kristallnacht. To the substance of the resolution he replied, "Arab ministers who have served in my government; to the Arab deputy speaker of my Parliament; to Arab officers and men serving of their own volition in our border and police defense forces, frequently commanding Jewish troops; to the hundreds of thousands of Arabs from all over the Middle East crowding the cities of Israel every year; to the thousands of Arabs from all over the Middle East coming for medical treatment to Israel; to the peaceful coexistence which has developed; to the fact that Arabic is an official language in Israel on a par with Hebrew; to the fact that it is as natural for an Arab to serve in public office in Israel as it is incongruous to think of a Jew serving in any public office in an Arab country, indeed being admitted to many of them. Is that racism? It is not! That... is Zionism." Herzog tore up a copy of the resolution before the General Assembly.

In 1991, as a precondition for the Madrid Peace Conference, the UN rescinded Resolution 3379, saying simply, "The general assembly decides to revoke the determination contained in its resolution 3379 (XXX) of 10 November 1975."

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Who is the prophet of our Haftorah?

Malachi is the final prophet of Tanach; passages in his brief book imply that he lived during the second Beit haMikdash. Malachi appears to live after the initial construction of the Beit haMikdash, for he makes no reference to the building process. In addition, biblical passages like Ezra 5:1 list the prophets of the start of the second Beit haMikdash, and omit Malachi.

The Talmud (such as Megilah 3a and Yoma 9b) places Malachi in the Anshei Keneset haGedolah ("Great Assembly") which legislated for the Jewish community at the start of the second Beit haMikdash. Views cited in the Talmud (Megilah 15a) identify Malachi as either Mordechai or Ezra, but classical commentaries, including Radak and Abarbanel, do not accept these identifications literally.

Malachi addresses a community which is not excited by its Beit haMikdash; people bring inferior korbanot (1:7-8) and do not tithe (3:8), men have abandoned Jewish wives for the daughters of idolatry (2:11), and kohanim are derelict in their duties (2:1-3). His role is to remind the nation that G-d has selected them for a special destiny (1:2-5) and to remind them that a day of judgment is coming (3:19-24).

Malachi concludes his vision with a pledge that Eliyahu haNavi will herald the arrival of Mashiach, which will include a reunion of the generations in the service of G-d. (3:23-24)

For more on Malachi, join our class at Shaarei Shomayim, :30 PM on Tuesdays. We begin to study Malachi this week.

What is the message of our haftorah?

Malachi's style is one of dialogue, in which the prophet plays both sides; he conveys a message from G-d, then tells the people what their response will be, and then offers a Divine rejoinder. At the outset of our Haftorah (1:2), Malachi declares, "G-d loves you." He continues, "You will say, 'How has He loved us?'" To which Malachi then responds, "Esav was the brother of Yaakov, and I demolished his descendants and did not allow them to rebuild," in contrast with the children of Yaakov who had been permitted to return and rebuild. This connects our haftorah with our parshah, in which we read of the Divine blessing passed to Yaakov rather than Esav.

Malachi continues (1:6) with words of rebuke for the Jewish nation, accusing them of failure to honour G-d as a child honours a parent, and of failure to fear G-d as a servant fears a master. He

rebukes the kohanim, in particular, for degrading the Name of G-d, and he then envisions the kohanim responding, "How have we disgraced Your Name?" To this Malachi responds, "You bring blind, lame and diseased animals as offerings; would you dare bring this to your human ruler?"

Our haftorah's message concludes on a positive note, with a description of the ideal kohen of G-d. The model priest speaks Torah, deals with others in peace and justice, and leads the nation back from their sins, to lives of piety. (2:6-7)

Halachic applications of our haftorah

Malachi's rebuke (1:8), "Try bringing that offering to your human ruler," is cited as a basis for laws requiring that the gifts we present to G-d must be respectable. Even though G-d has no real use for our offerings, we must relate to G-d in a respectful manner. So it is that we may not use wine which has a bad aroma for kiddush (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 272:1), and lamps in shul should not use oil which people would consider repellent (ibid 154:12).

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Highlights for November 17-23 / 3 Kislev - 9 Kislev

Shabbat, November 17

Or Chaim Shabbaton: Hillel Horovitz, Yair Manas

7:45 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Reasons for mitzvot and the parshah, Or Chaim

10:20 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

3:35 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daf Yomi: Shabbat 45, BAYT

3:55 PM Adam Frieberg, Shaarei Tefillah

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Avodah Zarah: Interfaith Circumcision II, BAYT

6:40 PM Parent-Child Learning: Welcoming Guests, Shaarei Shomayim

Sunday, November 18

9:15 AM Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Zichron Yisroel, Hebrew (Shacharit 8:30 AM)

After maariv R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachic Questions in Israel, **Hebrew**, Clanton Park, **men**

8:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Contemporary Halachic Questions in Israel, **Hebrew**, 4 Tillingham Keep, **mixed**

Monday, November 19

8-10 PM Monday night Beit Midrash at Bnai Torah

8 PM Hillel Horovitz, Shemuel II : Avshalom's Rebellion, Bnai Torah

8 PM R' Ezra Goldschmiedt, Mesilat Yesharim, Bnai Torah, *high school students*

8-10 PM Monday night Beit Midrash at Clanton Park

Tuesday, November 20

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Malachi 1: Yaakov and Esav, Shaarei Shomayim, *Mekorot*

7:30 PM Hillel Horovitz, Shemuel Bet: King David's Period of Glory, KST

8 PM Yair Manas, Chaburah: Sanhedrin, 33 Meadowbrook

8:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Rambam's Laws of Kings: Pilegesh, Shomrai Shabbos, *men*

8:45 PM R' Ezra Goldschmiedt, Jewish Clothing Controversies, Week 4, BAYT

Wednesday, November 21

10 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Supernatural/Superstition, Week 6: The Soul Part II, BEBY, *Melton*

8 PM Roving Beit Midrash R' Baruch Weintraub, Zionism: Common Past, Shared Future, Shaarei Shomayim

Thursday, November 22

8:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Sotah, Clanton Park

Coming Up!

Nov. 25: Breakfast: Jew in a non-Jewish World

Dec. 1: Shabbaton: Athens and Jerusalem, Thornhill Community Shul

Dec. 2: Shiur Theatre: When Konstantinos Met Sarah

Dec. 4: Panel Discussion: Shana Bet in Israel