



Temptations

By Moshe Crane, 12th Grade

While Esuv spent his time hunting in the fields, Yaakov spent his time studying and learning Torah. One day, Yaakov was making a stew when his brother Esuv came in from a long day of hunting and "Esuv said to Yaakov, 'Pour me some of that red stuff for I am exhausted.'... Yaakov said, 'Sell your birthright to me.' Esuv said, 'I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?'" (Bereishis 25:30-32)

There's an obvious question. Why would Esuv ever sell something as valuable as his birthright for something as simple as a bowl of stew? Esuv's getting ripped off and doesn't even seem to be upset.

While Esuv's actions seem to be illogical, I think many of us will connect to Esuv after understanding his thought process. The Chizkuni, in his commentary on the Pasuk, writes that Esuv had just returned from an exhausting ordeal hunting animals. As a result, when Esuv came back and smelled the soup, Esuv was unwilling to wait the necessary time to claim his birthright and in that moment felt that a bowl of soup was worth the trade.

Esuv's shortsighted trade shows that Esuv doesn't really understand what it means to be genuinely happy. True happiness, something Esuv failed to see, is achieved by sacrificing short-term pleasure and investing in your future. The temporary sense of satisfaction comes from the opposite course of action: giving in, which ultimately makes you feel lousy in the long run. Beyond the long-term loss, the fleet-

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Deceit or Destiny

By Akiva Mehlman, 10th Grade

When looking at Parshas Toldos, we see the classic story of Yaakov tricking Esav and taking his right to the first born blessing in exchange for lentils. There is one glaring question from this: Was Yaakov right to take Esav's blessing through trickery? One way to understand this is that the blessings were rightfully his because Rivka saw through Nivua that Yaakov was the one who was destined to continue the bris of Avraham. As the pasuk says, "There are two nations in your womb...The older will serve the younger one". This implies that Yaakov was chosen by Hashem to be the greater one. A second understanding is that only Yaakov was fit to carry on the legacy of the Jewish people. This is because Esav was a hunter and a man of violence who married women that were not fit to be counted amongst the Imahot. These actions of Esav showed that he did not understand and follow what the bris required.

By contrast, the pasuk seems to be critical of Yaakov when it says, "Your brother came with trickery, and took your blessing". Subsequently, Yaakov appears to be punished for this with Midah Kineged Midah when he had to leave for twenty two years, and then suffered an identical situation where Lavan switched Rachel and Leah, the older child for the younger child. Yaakov then cries out "Why did you deceive me (Rimitani)?" to which Lavan replies "It is not done in our place to put the youngest before the older one". The trickery that Yaakov accuses Lavan of, uses the same word that

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SPARKS OF CHASSIDUS



*With Jared
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This week's Parsha starts off by describing the lineage of Yitzchak. The Pasuk uses a very strange, as it says, "This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham gave birth to Isaac" (25:19). As the Torah never uses extra words, it is interesting how it uses the double language saying Avraham and Yitzchak's name twice each.

To understand the seemingly extra language of this Pasuk, let's take a look at the amazing idea developed by the Alter Rebbe. In Chassidus, we know that Avraham represents the middos of Chesed and Ahava, kindness and love, while Yitzchak represents the ideas of Gevura and Yira, strength and fear. Both of these middos are amazing in their own way, and every Yid has their own flavor of Yiddishkeit.

Now, when we take a look at the way our Tefilla is structured we can have a better idea of how these middos fit into our pasuk. The Alter Rebbe says that before we start our Tefillos we have to already have a small bit of Yira, fear, instilled in us. Just a simple fear like that of a policeman, I am scared of the punishment if I do wrong. This way when we have that infused into all our Tefillos it keeps the seriousness of it and keeps us focused throughout. Then you have to instill an equally important mida, Ahava. This can't be given from Hashem and has to be produced only from directly inside you. A type of Ahava that is thanking Hashem for everything that he gives us every day. This Ahava allows us to properly submit ourselves to Hashem by saying that we know You made and give us everything. Once you have the Ahava that you made yourself, Hashem strengthens that by giving you the Ahava of the prayer of Shema. This Ahava is much greater as it is given to you by Hashem on top of the foundations you built yourself. Then we get to Shmonei Esrei, the ultimate Tefilla. This is where the main Yira kicks in. It is a new type of Yira, not one that is fear of punishment, rather one of awe. Where we can't even believe how amazing Hashem and that we are just stuck in awe of appreciation of His greatness.

This order of our Tefilla shows us how our Pasuk flows. Our Tefilla goes from small Yira, to small Ahava, then to big Ahava, and finally to big Yira. Now that we know Avraham represents Ahava while Yitzchak represents Yira the order of our Pasuk is so clear. When we take a look at the pasuk we see it starts with Yitzchak's name (Yira), then Avraham's name (Ahava), then Avraham's name again (big Ahava) then finally Yitzchak's name again (big Yira). Thanks to the beautiful idea from the Alter Rebbe our Pasuk now proves our amazing idea and answers our question.

This teaches us two parts of a massive idea. Firstly, that our Tefilla has a certain structure which will only strengthen our Tefillos. Secondly, that when we put in effort Hashem pushes us further. When we start with our own Ahava, Hashem only pushes us further along the way. This can be a massive chizzuk as we now know to just put in the most effort you can and the rest is up to Hashem. Hopefully, we can all put in the maximum amount of effort to the best of our ability and bring the Moshiach Bemhaira Beyameinu!

The Impact of One's Surroundings

By: Dovie Hirsch, 10th Grade

In this week's Parsha, Toldos, we learn that when Rivka was pregnant she felt her sons kicking inside of her and she went to find out from Hashem what was happening. The pasuk says: "Vayitrotzatzu HaBanim Bikirbah, Vatomar Im Kain Lamah Zeh Anochi, Vatelech Lidrosh et Hashem." (Bereshit, 25:22) - "And the children struggled within her, and she said, 'If [it be] so, why am I [like] this?' And she went to inquire of Hashem." Rashi quotes the famous midrash that each son tried to get out of Rivka's womb. Yaaakov tried to get out when she passed Yeshivas Shem v'Ever. When she passed a place of Avodah Zara, Eisav tried to get out.

The question arises: The Gemara in Niddah 30a tells us that everyone learns all of Torah with a malach while developing in the mother's womb. So why, asks Rav Chaim Brisker, would Yaakov want to get out? He had the best possible chavrusa! Why would he want to leave?

One answer to this question is that though Yaakov was learning all of the Torah in utero, he didn't have to work for it. Yaakov wanted to get out and learn the Torah by exerting himself and studying intently. Working hard for something is not the same as having it handed to you on a silver platter. People simply appreciate something more when they work hard for it.

In his sefer "Shalom Rav," Rabbi Rosner gives another answer. Rav Chaim answers in the name of his father, the Beit HaLevi: "Since he was in the presence of the wicked Esav, it was preferable to forgo learning with the angel. Of utmost importance is not to remain connected to a wicked person."

In other words, even though Yaakov was learning with the greatest chavrusa, an angel, his brother Eisav created a negative environment. It was better for him to leave his awesome chavrusa than stay in an environment filled with negativity and evil influences because that negativity could eventually rub off on him.

Rabbi Rosner elaborates and reminds us about the mishna in Pirkei Avos 1:7: "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor and don't connect to the wicked." The version in Avos DeRabbi Natan adds two words: veafilu leTorah – even for Torah. In other words, if you need to place yourself in bad company to learn Torah, you should forgo learning the Torah in that environment.

Yaakov realized that even though he was learning with a malach, he was also in the company of a "bad neighbor." The evil influence of Eisav outweighed the good of his chavrusa. It's important to look at our surroundings and our social circumstances because, ultimately, the people around us impact us greatly. This is the only way for us to become successful in Torah and middos.

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Yitzchak used by Yaakov. He is also tricked later on when his children dipped Yosef's coat in blood which caused Yosef to be away for twenty two years, the same amount Yaakov was away.

Rabbi Sacks (May he have a Refuah Shelaima) therefore explains that the prophecy that Rivka saw was a "Chida", intentionally ambiguous. It not only can be understood as meaning that the older will serve the younger one, but also at the same time meaning that the younger will serve the older one. This seems to be a contradiction as both brothers cannot be greater and at the same time serve each other.

Rabbi Sacks further explains that Yitzchak truly understood both his sons. He loved Esav but was not blind to the fact that Yaakov was chosen to continue the nation. Therefore, Yitzchak made two brachot. He wanted to bless Esav, which through trickery turned out to be Yaakov, with wealth and power. Yitzchak had intended to give Esav a bracha appropriate to him just like the one Avraham gave Yishmael. The brachot that were intended for Yaakov were those that Hashem gave Avraham and Yitzchak which were about children and land. This blessing was also given to Yaakov before he left home. It was that bracha that Yitzchak intended for Yaakov all along, which didn't need trickery.

Yaakov eventually realized this in the beginning of Parshat Vayishlach when he met Esav and saw all the cattle that he had from Lavan and did an act of Teshuva. He gave back Esav's blessing by giving him presents representing wealth, and bowing which represented power. The contradiction is, therefore, resolved by understanding that throughout history there will be a constant struggle between the descendants of the two brothers.

From Yaakov's actions we see that we need to learn and grow through our choices and experiences. Although, we live life looking forwards, we sometimes don't understand it until we take a look backwards. Only then do we see what we could have done differently, and just like Yaakov, we can learn from it and fix it.

STORIES OF GREATNESS

TOLD OVER BY: YOSEF SCHAFLER

In his early years, before he went public with his teachings and disciples came from far and wide to learn from him, the founder of the Chassidic movement, Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, was an incessant traveler.

Dressed in the clothes of a simple villager, he would travel from town to town asking questions. "How are things?" he would inquire of the water-carrier yoked to his pails, of the market-woman minding her stall, of the child playing in the doorway of his home. "Is there enough to eat? Is everyone healthy?" These simple, G-d-fearing and G-d-trusting Jews would reply with simple statements of praise and thanks to Hashem, and the traveler would depart with the gratified step of one who has found what he was seeking.

One day, Rabbi Israel arrived in a village and made his way to the study hall. There, in a corner, sat an ancient Torah scholar immersed in his books, wrapped in tallit and tefillin. This was the village porush ("ascetic"), who led a life of holy seclusion. From sunrise to sunset, not a morsel of bread or a sip of water would pass his lips; he spoke to no one and never lifted his eyes from the sacred tomes. For more than fifty years he had kept to this regimen, utterly removed from the mundane cares of material life.

So why was this stranger pestering him? "How are things?" he was inquiring, "Is there enough to eat?

Is everyone healthy?" The ascetic made no reply, hoping the stranger would go away. But the stranger only leaned closer, and his questioning grew more insistent. Impatiently, the ascetic waved him away, pointing him to the door.

"Rabbi," the stranger now asked, "why are you denying G-d His livelihood?"

The words had their desired effect: the old man was roused to indignant attention. G-d's livelihood?! The audacity of this uncouth peasant! "What are you saying?" he demanded in a thunderous voice. "How dare you disturb me with such blasphemous babble!"

"Only what King David, the sweet singer of Israel, proclaims in his Psalms," replied the Baal Shem Tov. "Tell me, Rabbi, what is the meaning of the verse, 'And You, the Holy One, who dwells by the praises of Israel!'"

"We mortal beings," continued the Baal Shem Tov when the porush made no reply, "subsist on the sustenance that G-d provides us in His great kindness. But what does G-d 'subsist' on? On the praises of Israel! When one Jew asks another, 'How are things' and his fellow responds by praising and thanking the Almighty, they are nourishing G-d, deepening His involvement with His creation."

Adapted from Chabad.org

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Separation of Powers

By: Moshe Acobas, 11th Grade

After many years of tefillah Rivka and Yitzchak finally gave birth to a set of drastically different twins. Yaakov, calm and relaxed, enjoyed sitting and learning, while Eisav enjoyed hunting and trickery. Once the time came for Yitzchak to give brachot to Yaakov and Eisav we see something surprising. Yitzchak told Eisav to go hunt for an animal and bring it to him so he can bless him. At the same time, Rivka told Yaakov to disguise himself as Eisav so he could receive the blessing of the first born. This detail implies that Yitzchak wanted to give the blessing to Eisav. The question is, why would Yitzchak not want Yaakov, the Tzadik, to receive the special blessing of the firstborn?

We see a beautiful answer by Rav Aharon Schachter. When we look at Avraham's life, he wasn't isolated. Rather, he was always having guests, bringing people together etc. He was a man of the world. So when Yitzchak looked at his two sons he asked himself: Who will carry on the legacy of Avraham "Birkat Avraham"? The obvious answer is Eisav, who was a man always out and about. But Yitzchak wasn't looking to disregard Yaakov by doing this. Rather, Yitzchak was making a separation of powers between the spiritual blessing and the blessing of bringing the spirituality into the world, just like Yaakov did with his children many years later. Each child was given his own, unique blessing.

Rivka realizes that although this idea is novel, Eisav is not fit to be bringing spirituality into the world. This is the reason why Rivka suddenly told Yaakov to disguise himself as Eisav to receive the bracha of the firstborn. This can also explain why in the next parsha, Yaakov switches from being the "tent dweller" to being a shepherd all day and dealing with Lavan. It's important to have spirituality in every aspect of life. Not only when sitting and learning, but even when dealing with physical matters, we should always have a spiritual outlook.

Shabbat Shalom.

(Dvar Torah from Rav Aharon Schacter, heard from Rabbi Elchanan Poupko)

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ing sense of happiness gained from the quick-and-easy choice isn't even comparable to the true joy you can gain from in this lifetime. "You get what you pay for," as they say. Not only does taking shortcuts for a glimpse of happiness not give you true happiness, but it has the added effect of setting you farther back from your overall goal of attaining true happiness. Those who travel down the path of immediate gratification are only cheating themselves.

Unfortunately, Esuv's habit of short-term thinking is still common in today's world. Many of us are guilty of using similar reasoning to engage in detrimental behavior. Teens have a tendency to reject delayed gratification in favor of having it in the present. We must strive to learn from Esuv's mistake to make healthy decisions by being aware that each and every decision has a direct impact on our life. For example, smokers rationalize their bad habit by saying that "While there are very dangerous health risks associated with smoking, they occur later down the road and I have an intense desire now. Therefore, I'll continue smoking." I think we can all see the faulty logic there. While smoking is just an extreme case, the same type of thinking can and has been applied to more common situations ranging from the relatively harmless to the straight-up dangerous; this is because, the rationale goes, the intense need for immediate gratification justifies the behavior. Just like Esuv cared only about what he wanted now, those who use this faulty logic don't think about tomorrow.

It is not too late though! G-d set up a system that demands that we grow. That doesn't mean to enjoy life now and begin to work on yourself during your year in Israel. Growth is a long process and the necessary change cannot happen overnight. Although waiting for Israel to straighten out has worked for some, it has been proven to be a bad plan for too many people. Many have ruined their lives by making stupid mistakes in high school. We must start to fight temptations now, one day at a time. If we do that, we will finally gain the true and lasting happiness, a level of happiness not attainable from the temporary and fleeting pleasure we passed up. The more you're able to overcome your Yetzer Hara, the happier you will become!

HOW DID YAAKOV TRICK YITZCHAK?

By JoBe Silver, 11th Grade

As Yaakov approached his father, Yitzchak, to receive the brachos, the Torah relates that, "Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esav. And he did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like the hands of his brother Esau, and he blessed him.(27:22-23)

The moment Rivka caught wind of Yitzchak's intention to bless Esav, instead of Yaakov, she immediately devised a plan that would allow Yaakov to receive the brachos. Through trickery, Rivka was able to convince Yitzchak that the son standing before him, Yaakov, was really Esav. This action elicited the famous words from Yitzchak: "Hakol Kol Ya'akov V'hayadayim Yiday Esav" - The voice is that of Yaakov, while the hands are those of Esav.

The Beis Halevi is bothered by this story, specifically Yitzchak's seeming indifference towards which son received the brachos. He asks, shouldn't have Yitzchak been somewhat suspicious that the mystery son before him possessed the qualities of both of his sons? Concerning brachos of this magnitude, shouldn't Yitzchak have ensured that he was giving them to the right son?

Obviously, being as great as he was, Yitzchak knew what he was doing. So, why does it seem as if he was outsmarted by Yaakov? The answer is, he wasn't; he was just following Esav's plan. Esav was an intelligent man: He anticipated that Yaakov would try to steal the brachos, therefore, he told Yitzchak that when he would come to get the brachos, he would speak in Yaakov's voice. Esav thought that in an attempt to wrestle the brachos from him, Yaakov would imitate not only the dress of Esav, but also his voice. So, when Yaakov approached Yitzchak with his own voice and Esav's clothing, Yitzchak assumed that Esav was merely following through with his plan, while in reality Yaakov had outsmarted Esav, and Yitzchak gave the brachos to Yaakov.

Adapted from Rabbi Rosner's Parsha Shiur

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