

Peninim On The Torah

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Parashat Toldot

Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a wholesome man abiding in tents. (25:27)

Eisav became a hunter, but not only in the literal sense. He was crafty, able to ensnare people with his guile. He became adept at convincing his father that he was actually pious and virtuous by asking him questions, such as: how does one tithe salt or straw? This made him appear to be concerned about every aspect of the mitzvah of Maaser, tithing, although he knew that one does not tithe these products. The examples that Eisav chose as vehicles for his subterfuge seem to be significant. He could have selected any of a number of other mitzvos which are characterized by many details. What made him choose these two?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that in order to understand the significance of Eisav's question, it is first incumbent upon us to consider the nature of the world and the interface between its various components. It is a basic axiom that some things in this world fall under the category of *ikar*, primary and intrinsically important, while others are *tafeil*, secondary and subordinate to the *ikar*. Indeed, the world we live in, *Olam HaZeh*, is subordinate to the World to Come, *Olam HaBa*. Absolute reality exists only in the eternal world of truth, for This World is only temporary and, hence, preparatory for the next world. Our world is *tafeil*. *Olam HaBa* is the *ikar*.

Throughout Jewish thought, the dichotomy between *ikar* and *tafeil* plays an important role in defining what is important and what exists just as a vehicle to reach the true goal. For example, the other six days of the week constitute the *tafeil* to Shabbos, which is the *ikar*. Fruit has its meaty, juicy flesh and its outer skin. The flesh obviously is the *ikar*, while the outer skin is the *tafeil*. The skin is there to protect. It exists for the purpose of serving the fruit.

This concept pervades all of Jewish life. Ostensibly, we are to retain our focus on the *ikar*, but, nonetheless, we are not to ignore the purpose which the *tafeil* serves. Spiritual pursuits are the goal of man's life. By looking towards reaching our ultimate objective of spiritual perfection, we must make use of the *tafeil*, thereby sanctifying it. If, however, we misconstrue our priorities and give exalted significance to the *tafeil*, we will achieve nothing at all.

Thus, by having the correct attitude towards *Olam HaZeh*, This World, realizing that it serves as a vestibule to gain entry into *Olam HaBa*, we elevate the *tafeil*. We enable the light of *Olam HaBa* to permeate even our physical level by realizing that Shabbos is the primary focus of the entire week. We

elevate the weekdays by virtue of the reality that the entire week nurtures its strength from Shabbos. Even though the weekdays are subordinate to Shabbos, they hold spiritual significance which reflects great value. Similarly, if we attribute significance to the outer layer of the fruit as the necessary coating to preserve the fruit inside, it becomes valuable and is, therefore, subject to the laws of tumah and taharah, spiritual purity and impurity.

With the above in mind, we may approach the basic difference between Yaakov Avinu and Eisav. Yaakov, the brother who was more spiritually inclined, was the ikar. His life and that of his descendants, Klal Yisrael, were the focus of Creation - to live a spiritually refined and committed life, while utilizing This World as a means for perceiving and achieving Olam HaBa. In contrast, Eisav's life centered around the tafeil, Olam HaZeh, replete with its physical pursuits. As long as Yaakov remains pre-eminent and Eisav subordinate, the world can be perfected and reach towards its goal. Thus, Eisav will also achieve spiritual ennoblement -- as a result of his subordination to Yaakov.

Eisav had a difficult time accepting the recipe of "subordinate and, hence, valuable." He wanted to be the ikar, in place of Yaakov. He needed to feel that everything in this world was created for him - alone - and not for his brother. A beautiful Midrash illustrates this idea. The straw, the chaff and the bean once had a dispute concerning for whom the field was sown. Each contended that the field was there specifically for it. Along came the wheat, saying, "Wait until the threshing is carried out, and then we will see for whom the field has really been sown." When the threshing season arrived, the expected happened. The bean was thrown in the wind, the straw was thrown on the ground, and the chaff was burned. The farmer took the remaining wheat and piled it up. Everyone saw and derived great pleasure. Likewise, the nations of the world, descendants of Eisav, all claim, "We are the ikar; the world was created for us." Klal Yisrael's response parallels that of the wheat, "Wait, and we will know for whom the world has been created."

The Shem MiShmuel suggests a reason that Yitzchak Avinu wanted to bless Eisav, rather than Yaakov. By blessing Eisav, he might have imbued him with a little seichel, common sense, to understand that the life Yaakov was leading was the ikar and that, by assisting him, he would also achieve perfection. Regrettably, Yitzchak did not realize how far gone, how coarse and unresponsive, Eisav had become. His arrogance was incurable; his obstinacy was terminal..

He cites his father, the Avnei Nezer who describes the nadir of Eisav's arrogance. The Zohar HaKadosh teaches us that there are clouds of darkness into which light enters, but is totally consumed. This is the same idea that is repeated by the seven meager cows into which the seven fat cows entered. No trace was left of their presence. Someone like Eisav-- who was completely overcome with arrogance-- is totally impervious to any sort of modification. Even if a little sanctity is introduced to him, it is completely consumed by the overwhelming nature of his personality.

We now can understand what Eisav was attempting to prove by questioning the laws of Maaser concerning salt and straw. Having analyzed Eisav's character, we see that this question does not merely represent his perverted and false piety, it bespeaks his essence. Eisav perceived himself as the ikar, while Yaakov was the tafeil. Thus, he asked about straw, which is a tafeil, and salt, a condiment and also a tafeil. By questioning the Maaser law, he was indicating that he considered these items to have primary status. Eisav attempted to overturn the Divine order to create a change in the definition of primary and subordinate. He has not changed; his descendants and followers still perceive that which is of a secondary nature to have primary standing.

The bottom line is how we view life on this world: Is it a trip, or is it our destination? Eisav and his ilk have supplanted this world for Olam HaBa. As far as they are concerned, they have arrived.

Yaakov is acutely aware that his destiny is the World to Come. He can only arrive at his ultimate destination by traveling through this world. Horav Ezriel Tauber, Shlita, has an excellent analogy which appropriately supports this idea.

A traveler purchases a ticket from New York to Rome. On that same plane is another traveler who is taking that identical flight, but is not paying a penny. In fact, she is actually being paid to fly to Rome! Who is she? It is the plane's stewardess. What difference is there between her and all of the other passengers?

The difference is that the stewardess is not really going to Rome. When the flight is over, she will take the next flight and return to New York. She is there only for the sake of the passengers. The passenger, on the other hand, is specifically traveling to another destination. The plane is merely the medium of transportation for her. Thus, we have two people on the same plane, each traveling for a different reason.

This world is also an airplane. It is the vehicle that transports us from This World to Olam HaBa, which is our final destination. Just as an airplane has two types of travelers: passengers and stewardesses, so too, is the world populated by two types of people: those who have a destiny and those who are along just for the ride.

Yitzchak loved Eisav because game was in his mouth. (25:28)

It is difficult to accept that Yitzchak Avinu, the Olah Temimah, perfect sacrifice, would be fooled by Eisav's ruse. To suggest that Eisav's halachic questions concerning such unconventional issues as tithing salt or straw would sway Yitzchak's opinion of what his errant son really was is insupportable. Yet, this is the way it appears. Yitzchak was holy and far removed from evil. Thus, he could not sense the sinister direction that Eisav had taken in life. Having been raised in an atmosphere of evil, Rivkah Imenu was more astute in recognizing Eisav's true character. Horav Meir Rubman, zl, contends that Yitzchak knew only too well what his son had become. He understood that Eisav was no simple child at risk; he was evil incarnate. He did not, however, give up hope on his son. Why? Because Eisav still demonstrated respect at home. He did not flaunt his lack of observance. He put on a show when he came home, even asking halachic questions. Such a child has to be given a chance.

Rav Rubman explains that there are two approaches to addressing the problem of a child that has turned from the Torah way. If he has totally rebelled against his parents to the point that he neither listens to them nor shows them any respect, the parents must "bite the bullet" and distance him from their home. Perhaps, when they treat him in a manner like that in which he is acting towards them, he might wake up and realize what he is doing. When a child, however, maintains respect for his parents, careful not to disrupt the house by his lack of observance, attempting to conceal his errant ways at times, then there is hope. In fact, the parents should make every effort to reach out to him and enable him to return.

Eisav put on a great show. He would don royal garments when he served his father. He represents the paradigm of Kibbud Av, honor of his father. Despite his implacable hatred for Yaakov, he refused to harm him as long as his father was still alive. Indeed, Yaakov's greatest fear issued from his awareness of Eisav's meticulous observance of Kibbud Av.

Yitzchak was acutely sensitive to the nuances of relating to Eisav. Nonetheless, he felt that as long as Eisav demonstrated a modicum of respect, even though it was probably perfidious, Yitzchak embraced him with love. Perhaps he might succeed in turning him around. As long as he did not close

the door, Eisav might still return. Yitzchak demonstrated love to Eisav. It was an outward expression of love, so that he might convince him to return. Eisav fooled no one but himself.

Yaakov said, "Sell, as this day, your birthright to me." (25:31)

Horav Naftali Ropshitzer, zl, suggests a compelling interpretation for this pasuk. He cites the Midrash that quotes Yaakov Avinu as asking Eisav: Michrah kayom, "Sell as this day;" "Sell me one of your days." He explains that Yaakov is referring to a specific day which was part of Eisav's division of the "inheritance." This is a reference to a previous pasuk (Ibid 25:22), "The children agitated within her." They were arguing about the inheritance of the two worlds: This World; and the World to Come. It was decided that Yaakov would receive Olam HaBa, the World to Come, whereas Eisav would receive Olam HaZeh, This World. Yaakov felt that concerning the physical necessities and pleasures that this world had to offer, he could do with a bare minimum. He, therefore, agreed to partake as little as possible from this world. This became a problem concerning Shabbos, regarding which it is written in Yeshayah 58:13, "If you proclaim the Shabbos a delight." Chazal teach us that one must honor the Shabbos with food and drink. Thus, if Yaakov removed himself from this world, he would also be precluding himself from observing the mitzvah of oneg Shabbos. How would he be able to truly enjoy Shabbos? Therefore, he requested of Eisav: "Sell me one of your days. Sell me the Shabbos so that I may observe it properly." The kayom is a mnemonic for kulam yisbe'u v'yisangu mituvecha. It is a day when "all of them (Klal Yisrael)" will be satisfied and delight in "Your goodness," which is a reference to Shabbos.

The word bechorascha, your birthright, remains to be explained. Yaakov did, in fact, ask for the bechorah, right of the firstborn. Horav Eliyahu Schlessinger, Shlita, explains that Shabbos is indeed the bechor, "firstborn," of the six days of creation, because its unique sanctity towers above the other days of the week. Furthermore, the Zohar HaKadosh writes that all of the days of the week are blessed through the Shabbos, similar to the firstborn who is the individual that the other siblings follow.

Eisav, who neither observed Shabbos nor respected the idea of cessation from labor for one day, felt that by observing Shabbos he was endangering his livelihood and, subsequently, his life. Thus, he responded, "Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is the birthright (ibid.25:32)? Not to work and earn money and to spend extra for oneg Shabbos, that is ludicrous! One must have taken leave of his senses to believe in Shabbos."

Bearing in mind that Shabbos is the special birthright that Yaakov acquired from Eisav, we are able to understand why Yaakov merited to receive the blessings from Yitzchak concerning Olam HaZeh, This World. Shabbos is the source of blessings for the rest of the week. One who observes Shabbos properly, both in the positive and prohibitive aspects, merits an abundance of blessings. Yaakov received what he deserved. By requesting Shabbos, he received much more.

And Eisav said, "Look I am going to die, so of what use is the birthright?" Yaakov said, "Swear to me as this day." Yaakov gave Eisav bread and lentil stew. (25:32,33,34)

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains why Yaakov Avinu demanded that Eisav take an oath that he was agreeing to sell the birthright. The bechorah, birthright, includes in it certain aspects which

are intangible, such as the honor and nobility accorded to the firstborn. Yaakov wanted everything that the bechorah had to offer. The Torah stipulates that one cannot cause another to acquire something which is intangible. Since there was no kinyan, act of acquisition, concerning the intangible components of the birthright, Yaakov insisted that Eisav make a shevuah, oath, which does relate to intangible items. The Torah emphasizes that the sale of the birthright was halachically accurate and binding, even though Eisav sold the birthright for a ridiculously low price. He knew what he was selling, and it had very little value to him. The Torah records that he abused the birthright, indicating that it was worthless to him. Regardless of what it was worth to him, it is the value which he attributed to it. He assessed its value according to his perspective on what it was worth to him. Therefore, the acquisition is deemed valid.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, derives an important lesson from here. Man has the capacity for determining the value of something that is eternal in nature. If in Eisav's estimation the bechorah was not worth more than a bowl of red lentils, then this sets its value.

Thus, a student studying Torah in the yeshivah who decides to leave seder, study period, so that he can purchase a suit on sale has just indicated that the value of his Torah learning coincides with the amount of money he saved on his suit. While this comparison may be a bit extreme, it does drive home a message: We determine by our very actions the value we attribute to spirituality and eternity. If we cut our davening short to tend to business negotiations and we are not willing to get up any earlier in order to attend an earlier minyan, so that we can daven at our normal pace, it demonstrates how much we really value our davening. When a person is willing to defer his spiritual time, the time during which he acquires a portion of eternity, for something of frivolous value, he has just put a price on his spirituality - and that price is very low.

But he (Yitzchak) said, "Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing. (27:35)

It is surprising that Yitzchak Avinu would make such a statement condemning Yaakov to Eisav. The only purpose it might have served was to increase Eisav's hatred for his brother. Yitzchak could have easily not responded, or played it down. Why did he emphasize that Yaakov came b'mirmah, with cleverness and guile? Furthermore, when Eisav asked for a blessing, Yitzchak replied, "Behold, a lord I have made him over you, and all his kin I have given him as servants...and for you, where - what can I do, my son?" (ibid 27:37) Was he not adding insult to injury? Surely his response was not going to endear Yaakov to Eisav. What was Yitzchak trying to accomplish?

Horav Yaakov Lugasy, Shlita, gives a practical rationale for Yitzchak's actions. Rashi tells us that when Eisav entered the room and Yitzchak realized who he really was, he also noticed that Gehinom, Purgatory, was open beneath Eisav. This was in sharp contrast to the fragrance of Gan Eden, Paradise, that had accompanied Yaakov when he preceded him. This sharp disparity between his two sons evoked in Yitzchak a powerful revelation. His two sons represented two different worlds that had absolutely nothing in common with one another. Their values were different: Eisav was seeking the physical world and all that it had to offer; and Yaakov was concerned only with the spiritual world. Yaakov sought kedushah, holiness, mitzvos and Torah study. Eisav's pursuits were of a more base nature. He valued anything immoral that would satisfy his lust. Murder was child's play to him. Upon observing this, Yitzchak realized that Yaakov would be the one to continue the chain of belief in the Almighty which had begun with his father, Avraham Avinu. This would occur only if Yaakov's family remained pure and untainted. If his descendants were allowed to mingle with those of Eisav, it would

lead to intermarriage and the destruction of the Patriarchal DNA. No! Yaakov and Eisav could never interact in brotherhood. Until the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, the two siblings must remain far apart. There was one simple way to ensure this: creating animus between them. Indeed, Chazal teach us that it is axiomatic that Eisav hates Yaakov. This is where it began and it will end only at the end of time.

Yitzchak held no grudge against Yaakov. On the contrary, when Yaakov returned, Yitzchak blessed him once again. He had seen the truth. His two sons had disparate goals. Their values were as dichotomous as night and day. As long as they remained apart, they would be able to continue to live without discord between them. It is when Yaakov seeks to interface with Eisav that Yitzchak's work is reversed, and the implacable enmity is unleashed.

And these are the offspring of Yitzchak, son of Avraham. Avraham begot Yitzchak. (25:19)

Why is it necessary to repeat that Avraham begot Yitzchak, when the Torah had just asserted that Yitzchak was Avraham's son? The Midrash, as cited by Rashi, explains that the Torah emphasizes that Avraham fathered Yitzchak because the scoffers of that generation had concluded that Sarah had become pregnant by Avimelech during her short stay with him. Decades had passed, and she and Avraham had not been blessed with a child. Suddenly, after she was with Avimelech for a short duration, she was visibly pregnant. Thus, to allay any slander, Hashem made Yitzchak's features clearly similar to those of Avraham, so that there would be no question concerning his paternity.

Let us sit back and analyze this question. What purpose did these cynics have in questioning Yitzchak's paternity if not to deny that a miracle had occurred and Sarah had conceived? Let us say that the cynics were right and Sarah had become pregnant by Avimelech: is that any less a miracle? She was certainly beyond her child-bearing years!

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita offers an insightful explanation. The scoffers were not concerned about the miracle. They could understand miracles. Their problem was hemshech, continuity. The last thing they wanted was the continuity of Avraham's legacy. To explain this further, we cite the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 5:2, "There were ten generations from Noach to Avraham - to demonstrate how slow Hashem is to anger; for all the generations did more and more things to make Hashem angry, until Avraham Avinu came and received the reward for all of them." This means that had they been worthy, they would have received reward. Instead, Avraham merited this reward. This Mishnah is enigmatic. Are we to accept that every person from Adam until Noach and from Noach until Avraham were all evil? Was there no one that was worthy? Are we to ignore Shem, Ever, Mesushelach, and Chanoch? Surely, there must have been others, as well. The answer is that although these people were righteous, moral and upstanding, they were individuals. They had no impact on their progeny. They had no legacy, no continuity. The entire generation was viewed as evil, because the few individuals that were righteous left no one to transmit their righteousness to the next generation. When Avraham came on the scene, he gave birth to Yitzchak. He left a son that followed in his ways and chose his way of life.

When the cynics saw that Avraham was different, that he had someone to continue his legacy of monotheistic belief, they became distressed. They immediately countered by asserting that Yitzchak was not Avraham's son and that his real father was Avimelech. The miracle did not concern them. It

was the threat of continuity, of a future, that unnerved them.

This has been our challenge throughout history. Our antagonists - whether the Tzadukim, Baisussim, Maskilim, or whatever name they adopted to veil their real intentions - have had the goal of undermining Judaism and making sure that it not continue. They sought to sever the chain that stretches from Sinai, to live as a "free" nation: free of G-d; free of Torah and mitzvos. They succeeded with many. By producing a sterile generation of Jews who paid lip service to Hashem and His Torah, they ensured that their children would not even do that! They have succeeded in destroying aspects of the Jewish future.

We, who believe in "Avraham begat Yitzchak," who stood at Har Sinai and declared, Naaseh v'nishmah, "We will do and we will listen!" have maintained that chain of transmission. Despite persecution, genocidal torment, and "cultural enlightenment," we have maintained the heritage of Sinai and transmitted it to the next generation.

The spiritual survival of Klal Yisrael is one of the mysteries of history. What is the secret of our endurance? Rav Galinsky cites a passage in the Talmud in which a Roman matron asked Rabbi Yosi, "How large is this sheep?" She was referring to Klal Yisrael, who is compared to a sheep among seventy wolves, symbolizing the seventy nations of the world. She was wondering what power this sheep had to promote their survival among these hungry wolves. He replied, "How large is the shepherd?" He explained that actually the sheep were small and weak. The wolves were large, mean and hungry. So, how did the sheep survive? Their survival was due to the shepherd. The sheep held onto the big and strong shepherd for protection.

This is our source of survival: the shepherd. From Har Sinai until today, through every sort of religious persecution, we have endured because we have held on to Hashem, our Shepherd. The cynics of every generation have attempted to undermine our ability to transmit our legacy to the next generation. We triumph as long as we cling to the Shepherd and His Torah.

Eisav said to Yaakov, "Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff for I am exhausted." He, therefore, called his name Edom. (25:30)

As a result of Eisav's inappropriate speech, the manner in which he referred to the bowl of red soup, ignoring its significance and underlying message, he was given the name Edom, which means red. The name Edom in this circumstance is a term which signifies contempt - contempt for an individual who was so obsessed with satisfying his physical needs that he looked at food and referred to it only by its color. This was one sin, which epitomized his lack of values, but what about the other five sins that he committed that day? These were sins involving immorality, murder and idol worship. Are they to be ignored? Should they not be contributing factors to establishing Eisav's name?

Horav Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, zl, explains that Eisav, having been raised in both Yitzchak Avinu's home, and in the presence of his grandfather, Avraham Avinu, had acquired a profound perception of the ways of Hashem, so that he understood the erudite theology concerning serving the Almighty. Thus, he had sufficient rationale for validating and even justifying his more serious sins. Therefore, these sins were non-factors in deriving his name. They did not define his essence. Once he expressed himself in a manner that underscored his values and perspective on life, however, he had no excuse, no justification for his behavior. This is what he was, and so he was named. The real Eisav spewed from his mouth.

Because Avraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My Torahs. (26:5)

The four categories of mitzvah observance, as explained by Rashi, are: Mishmarti, My safeguards, referring to Rabbinic decrees which serve as barriers against transgressing a Biblical prohibition, mitzvosai; My commandments, denoting those laws that man's moral compass demands, chukosai; My decrees, which are laws that defy human rationale; Torasai, My Torahs, which is a reference to the two Torahs, Torah She'BiKsav, Written Law, and Torah She'Baal Peh, Oral Law. This basically includes everything that a Jew must observe. What, then, is the meaning of Koli, "My voice?" To which mitzvos does "My voice" refer?

Horav Aizik Ausband, Shlita, cites the Rambam at the beginning of Hilchos Taanis, who writes, "This is one of the ways of teshuvah, repentance. At a time that a calamity or trouble befalls the community, the people are to cry out and to blast the shofar. They should know that what occurs is the result of their evil deeds. By correcting their ways and repenting, they will cause the decree to be rescinded." By extension, this idea should apply to all incidents which occur in our lives. Everything that takes place does so for a reason and flashes a unique message intended specifically for the individual who has experienced the incident. Hashem is talking to him, telling him something. He should wake up and listen!

This is the meaning of "obeying Hashem's voice." One understands that everything that happens is Hashem's voice calling out to him, an awareness that should effect an appropriate response. Avraham Avinu taught us to listen to Hashem's voice, to be acutely aware that Hashem speaks to us through the episodes that happen in our lives. We must open up our eyes and "listen" to those hidden messages.

The stellar pasuk in Jewish life, the one that accompanies us through hardship and even death is, Shema Yisrael - "Hear O' Yisrael." We have to "hear" what Hashem is saying even if He does not articulate His messages in words, but, rather, in actions. Everyone has moments in his life when Hashem speaks to him. At times, it is a warning; alternatively, it may be an opportunity. If the individual is not listening to the message, however, it is wasted.

Harav Yissachar Frand, Shlita, relates the following story which gives us an insight into the meaning of listening to our messages. There is a small, nondescript, bleak town in northern England called Gateshead, right across the river from the well-known coal-producing town of Newcastle. The shochet, ritual slaughterer, of the Jewish community, Reb David Dryan, had a strange idea. He wanted to bring a group of young Torah scholars to the community to establish a kollel. He saw that his community lacked much in its spiritual dimension, and he felt the kollel would stem the tide, elevating the community. Little did he dream of the consequences of his actions. He was a determined man, and he began writing letters to no less than twenty-two rabbanim, inviting them to Gateshead to head this project. Twenty of these rabbanim did not even take the time to respond. One of them was kind enough to demur the invitation. The last one, the esteemed author of the Michtav M'Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, wrote back, "The next time you are in London, we should talk." Rav Dessler went to Gateshead and established what was to become the world class kollel of Gateshead. Indeed, Gateshead became the largest, most prestigious center for Torah study in Europe, replete with a Yeshiva, a Bais Yaakov High School and a Seminary. All of this occurred because one man listened to his messages. Rav Dessler certainly had enough items on his daily agenda that he could have easily placed the letter at the bottom of his pile of correspondence. He was a Torah scholar of distinction, a man to whom the entire world turned. Yet, he took the time to return a letter to a shochet in Gateshead,

because he viewed everything that occurred in his life as a message from Hashem.

This thesis is in no way meant to cast aspersion on any of the other rabbanim who ignored Reb David's letter. Surely, each of them had an important reason for what he did not do. After all is said and done, however, they all missed the opportunity of a lifetime.

We have to ask ourselves: how often has this happened in our own lives? How often have we taken our time responding to a request - or even responded in the negative, only to see someone else respond and achieve incredible success. That success could have been ours, or perhaps, if we would have reacted positively, we would have achieved even greater success. There are people who respond to the message and take advantage of the good fortune, because they know that Hashem is affording them an opportunity. There are, alas, those who do nothing but complain when others are successful. We should each ask ourselves: Which one am I?

And it came to pass when Yitzchak had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing. (27:1)

Rashi cites a number of reasons for Yitzchak Avinu's failing eyesight. One reason which he mentions is that when our Patriarch was laying on the Akeidah, bound and prepared to be offered up as a sacrifice, the ministering angels wept over him. Their tears fell into his eyes, dimming them. Obviously, there is a deeper meaning to this experience and these eye-dimming tears. The question that we might ask is: Yitzchak was involved in an incredible act of mesiras nefesh, self sacrifice. Was this his reward for such an unprecedented act of devotion to the Almighty? He was the one that planted the seeds of Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying Hashem's Name. Did he deserve to lose his eyesight for that?

When we think about it, the question is short-sighted. It is only due to Yitzchak's dimmed eyesight that Yaakov Avinu was able to receive the blessings from his father. Otherwise, Eisav would have been the beneficiary of the coveted blessings. In other words, Yitzchak's dimmed eyesight was a blessing in disguise. We see how what appears to be a punishment or a negative experience can really be a positive occurrence.

Rivkah grew up in Besuel's home. Her brother, Lavan, must have been a great source of nachas, pleasure, to his wicked father. Like father, like son. Why did Rivkah have to be there? Surely, she could have been raised in a home more suitable to her exemplary character traits. Did she not deserve better than that? Another perspective is that exposure to corruption and swindling educates a person to be aware and apprehensive of such behavior. A person raised in this type of environment can discern a swindler and prevent a mishap. Rivkah's "education" gave her a perceptive eye to see through Eisav's ruse and cunning. It is because of her background that she was able to save Yaakov and enable him to receive the blessings. Once again, we see that what appears to be negative, can really be a hidden blessing.

We all undergo experiences in life when what seems to be a negative occurrence is really a source of blessing. I am certain that this Torah thought will stimulate my readers to remember their own experiences. The following story, related by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in "Touched By A Story (2)", is an inspiring one: One of the major philanthropists of our generation is an individual who not only gives of his material assets, but also opens his heart to the needs of those seeking his support. Every tale of woe, of sadness and misery, finds a receptive ear. He does not merely want to give money and say goodbye. He wants to lend a sympathetic ear.

Every year he and his family would spend Succos in Yerushalayim, where he was besieged with people seeking his help. While he usually took care of the contributions himself, this year he had hired a man to be his gabbai tzedakah, secretary to disburse the charitable funds. He figured that this way he would have more time to listen personally to each person's needs. He would hand each person a card with a code denoting a specific amount of money. There were a total of five cards. While they represented clearly defined amounts, the gabbai had the right to render his own decision if he felt that his employer had underestimated the gravity of the situation.

The weeks went by, and the process went along smoothly. One day, a distinguished rabbi came to plead on behalf of his sick nephew. With tears in his eyes, he explained how his twenty-two year old nephew had been born with a brain tumor which, at the time, seemed non life-threatening. Over the years, it had shifted and now had to be removed. The surgery, which was dangerous and difficult, could only be performed in the United States. This operation involved a fortune, and there was no insurance. Could he, please, help? Without the surgery, his nephew, who had recently become engaged, had only three months to live.

The philanthropist himself was moved to tears. He immediately gave the rabbi a card indicating by code that the gabbai should extend all courtesies to this man and give him significantly beyond the usual amount. He wanted to make sure that the surgery and all ensuing costs would be addressed. He never told his gabbai to overrule him, but, this time, he hoped that he would.

The next day the gabbai came to his employer with an incredible story. "Twenty-four years ago, my wife and I lived in an apartment. We had two children, a two year old and a three month old. One day, a terrible fire broke out in the apartment. My wife thought I had escaped with both of our children. When we looked at each other and realized that the baby was still sleeping in the apartment, we became hysterical. The firemen would not let us return to the apartment, claiming it was too dangerous. We would never emerge alive. It was Hashgachah, an act of Divine Providence, that a bus returning from Tel Aviv stopped in front of the blazing apartment, at the behest of one of the passengers. This man ran out of the bus and, after assessing the situation, ignored everyone, ran to the rear of the building, climbed the fire escape and, with Hashem's help, saved my baby's life. That man was the father of this young man whose life is in danger. Twenty-four years ago, he saved my child's life. Now, I have the opportunity to repay this favor. I beg you to allow me to give him whatever he needs."

The philanthropist needed no encouragement and gave his gabbai a blank check to cover all expenses. We do not know why things happen the way they do. We live through what seems to be an isolated experience, only to discover many years later that it was an act of Providence to enable us to merit further deliverance. We must remember that nothing occurs in a vacuum and without reason. Hashem is the Source of all activity, and it is His way of calling to us. We should listen and respond accordingly.

And Hashem said to her: "Two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides shall be separated." (25:23)

Was it really necessary to put Rivkah Imeinu through such travail? Indeed, why were Yaakov and Eisav born as twins? Could it not have been some other way? The Ritva in his commentary to the Haggadah on the pasuk "To Yitzchak I gave Yaakov and Eisav" (Yehoshua 24:4), gives a most

compelling explanation. He posits that Eisav was Yaakov's twin to convey the message that Yaakov's righteousness is well-deserved and rightfully his. He did not achieve this pinnacle because of mazal, the astrological sign under which he was born, or because he inherited a unique DNA from his parents, nor because of any other intrinsic reason. He was born from the same womb as the wicked Eisav, his twin brother. Eisav went out l'tarbus raah, bad ways, while Yaakov chose the spiritually correct path of ascendancy in Torah, mitzvos and good deeds.

What a powerful statement! We no longer have any excuses for failure. Yaakov and Eisav were born as twins to remedy that and circumvent any excuse one might offer for spiritual failure. A Jew cannot use the pretext that he grew up in a non-observant home. So did Avraham. A Jew cannot claim extenuating circumstances; that he was under the influence of friends and neighbors who were distant from mitzvah observance. Yitzchak grew up with Yishmael and nonetheless, he reached the zenith of spirituality. A Jew cannot lay blame for his failure on being born under a "bad" astrological sign, spiritually deficient parents, or any other reason. Yaakov was born together with Eisav, yet, he rose to distinction, while Eisav plunged into iniquity. No, we have no excuses.

Yitzchak loved Eisav. (25:28)

We are very impressionable. Indeed, whatever impressions we form as small children seem to remain with us throughout life. Chazal refer to girsa d'yankesa, the material that one absorbs as a child, as being engraved upon a person's heart and mind even as he matures. Thus, if one has developed a certain mindset or impression as a young child in primary school, this impression will subtly affect any new opinions he will be exposed to throughout his life. As youngsters we were taught that Eisav was a rasha, wicked and evil person. Each and every one of us were given pictures of Eisav as a man who represented evil incarnate. The way he appeared to us was often up to the imagination of our individual teacher or whatever coloring books our school used. But, Eisav always appeared as some kind of devil, with a nasty smirk on his face, hairy and red, often carrying some type of weapon, which probably changed with time - and imagination. This unsavory portrait of Eisav remained imbedded in our minds throughout school and concomitantly - into adulthood. It was no one's fault. The rebbe/teacher taught the truth - Eisav was a rasha. So, he must be depicted as one. We knew no better, so, we accepted the ignoble picture of Eisav.

As intelligent adults, we would be ill-advised to follow this same script. Our minds have expanded as we research the various texts dealing with Eisav, and suddenly, lo and behold, a new, totally different picture of the evil Eisav emerges. Horav Yechezkel Sarna, zl, suggests that to continue studying Chumash based upon our youthful impressions is like studying the Written Law without the benefit of the commentary and interpretation of the Oral Law. It is incomprehensible. Therefore, in order to understand the narratives and personalities of the Torah, one must study Chazal, or else he is left with nothing more than his coloring book.

Let us now look at Eisav through the prism of Chazal. We are told that Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel says that his own kibud av, honoring of his father, did not come within one hundredth of Eisav's kibud av. He would wear everyday clothes when he served his father, while Eisav would don clothing fit for royalty when he approached his father. Now Rabbi Shimon was the distinguished Tanna who related about himself, that no person ever displayed respect to their parent in a manner even remotely comparable to him. In other words, in the area of kibud av, he had no peer. Yet, he also posits that he did not come close to Eisav. Bearing this appreciation of Eisav in mind, we can no longer view

him as the evil highwayman, the baneful sociopath. A man that reached the zenith of *kibud av* was no ordinary thief, no simple murderer. A man that would have plummeted to such a nadir of depravity as Eisav was described to us long ago, could not have reached the spiritual apex necessary for fulfilling the mitzvah of *kibud av* as he did. Furthermore, Yitzchak, the Olah Temimah, perfect sacrifice, was prepared to transfer the blessings he received from his father Avraham Avinu to Eisav. If Eisav would have possessed the base character depicted to us in our youth, does one think for a moment that Yitzchak would have bequeathed to him this major spiritual treasure? Are we to believe that the great Patriarch Yitzchak, who was a Navi, prophet, would err so dreadfully? No. Yitzchak loved Eisav for a reason. He saw a totally different person in front of him than the one we have been led to envision.

Rav Sarna penetrates further Eisav's mindset and gives us a clearer picture of this man. Concerning the pasuk (27:41), where Eisav thinks, "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my brother Yaakov," Chazal say the following: Eisav conjectured, "If I kill him, then Shem and Eiver will judge me and ask, 'Why did you kill your brother?' I will rather go to Yishmael and incite him to argue with Yaakov about the birthright. Then, I will be the redeemer of my brother's blood and kill Yishmael. Thus, I will inherit both Yaakov's and Yishmael's inheritance." Hashem, of course, delves into a person's heart and mind and confronted Eisav, whose immediate response was, "I did nothing!" Hashem, however, understood the evil plans that Eisav was conjuring in his mind.

We see from this that Eisav is held in contempt not for doing, not even for planning, but, for thinking about what he might consider doing. No, Eisav did not look the part, nor did he act the part. Hashem, however, judges a person according to a different barometer. A man who grows up in a home where the Shechinah is present, as it certainly was in Yitzchak's home, has no excuse to even think evil. Eisav thought maliciously about Yaakov. This earned him an eternal place among history's most infamous. This is what the Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, refer to as *omek haDin*, the depth of Judgment. We have no idea how penetrating and scrutinizing Heavenly Judgment can be, and hopefully, we will not find out.

But his mother said to him, "Your curse be on me, my son." (27:13)

The Bircas Yitzchak, blessings that Yitzchak gave his sons, established for eternity their variant destinies. One wonders why, if Hashem wanted Yaakov to ultimately receive the blessings, that He caused it to come about in such a surreptitious manner. Rivkah went out of her way to guide Yaakov in deceiving Yitzchak. This was risky both for Rivkah, as well as for Yaakov. Yitzchak surely would not have accepted this deception lightly. Was it really necessary? The Derashos HaRan explains that this all occurred by design. Indeed, in order to maintain Klal Yisrael's commitment to Hashem, it is essential that there be some entity that serves as an antagonist to remind us of our Father in Heaven. Thus, the seeds of enmity that were present at birth had to be cultivated through this deception. Eisav must feel cheated and Yaakov may never forget that Eisav hates him. Yaakov must remember that as long as he maintains his distinctiveness and displays a willingness to sacrifice himself for his convictions, then Eisav's anger will be restrained. However, if Yaakov displays weakness, Eisav comes on strong.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, in his *Ateres Avraham*, translated and anthologized by Rabbi Sholom Smith, gives an alternate explanation. Yaakov had a rough life. He went from challenge to challenge, from adversity to persecution. During the twenty-two years that he was away from his parents, Yaakov experienced considerable distress. First, Eisav's son, Eliphaz, attacked him and relieved him of his material possessions. Arriving at Lavan's home penniless, he now had to work for a man who redefined

the meaning of deceit. Twenty years of being cheated by a father-in-law would have broken a lesser person. He finally leaves only to face the danger of a confrontation with Eisav, whose anger still raged within him. Then there were the internal problems on the home front. First, there was the abduction and violation of his daughter, Dinah. This was followed by his wife Rachel's death as she gave birth to Binyamin. The "crown" of Yaakov's tzaros, distress, came as he was finally about to settle down in tranquility. It was then that the anguish of Yosef's disappearance occurred.

No, Yaakov's life was not an easy one. How then was he able to maintain his spiritual stamina, his unaltered conviction, his unequivocal commitment? How was he able to overcome so much distress, any one of which would have destroyed a lesser person? The Midrash gives us a fascinating response. Chazal say that what sustained Yaakov throughout his constant travail was the knowledge that "If I give up, I will forfeit all the energies that my mother invested in me to help me obtain the brachos." Yaakov lived with the constant awareness that his mother had risked so much to ensure that he receive the brachos. She told him, "Your curse, be on me, my son." This notion accompanied Yaakov throughout his life's endeavor. It was a constant inspiration, an unfailing encouragement to withstand the pressure and pain. It gave him the resolution and fortitude to overcome the various crises that he faced. It gave him the hope to persevere when feelings of despair engulfed him and might have held him back. Despite everything, Yaakov Avinu became the greatest Patriarch, the father of the Twelve Tribes.

Yaakov's story is the story of life. Many of us face trial and vicissitude, some more, some less. The overwhelming problems often seem too much to bear. It is at such times that we should take note of this meaningful Midrash: Remember the great energy that your parents expended on your behalf. Think about your mother's tears, your father's support, your parents' belief in you. They wanted you to succeed. They prayed for your success. How can you let them down?

I experienced this phenomenon first-hand as I was growing up. My father's fortieth Yahrzeit is coming up in two weeks. He was an individual who was born prior to World War I and was not able to receive a formal education in a yeshivah gedolah. He valued his cheder education and ability to learn Chumash and Rashi. The entire Sefer Tehillim which he recited daily, sustained him throughout the terrible Holocaust years and the various concentration camps that he survived. When my parents came to this country, they came with a hope to rebuild what they had lost. My father received his inspiration and spiritual succor from our rav, the saintly Veitzener Rav, Horav Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, zl. Together, they survived Auschwitz, and together they prepared to rebuild their lives and set the spiritual foundation for future generations.

My father was very devoted to his children and would do anything to see to it that our spiritual development was enhanced, regardless of the physical or financial strain it put upon him. There is one aspect of my youth that will always remain with me. In fact, whenever I have reached a sort of impasse in my Torah progress, my father's devotion and determination spur me on. My regular Day School

Torah education was not sufficient for my father. He, therefore, saw to it that whatever free time I had available was spent with a tutor, to advance my Torah studies. Every Friday night, during the cold winter months, I would go to the tutor to study for one hour. It was a twenty-five minute walk - each way. My father, of course, accompanied me, since I was young and in "those days" children did not wander around alone at night. During the hour session, my father would walk up and down the street. Chicago in the winter is freezing cold and windy. So, every Friday night, after my father had put in a seventy-hour workweek, he would walk for two hours in the cold. He did this so that his son could have some extra learning. While this may not seem like the most intriguing example of a parent's dedication to their child's spiritual growth - it has inspired me throughout my career. It also teaches us

that it is the "little things" that make a difference.

Rivkah then took her older son, Eisav's, clean garments... and clothed Yaakov, her young son. (27:15)

Throughout the Parsha we note that the Torah refers to Eisav as the gadol, older, son, and Yaakov, as the ben ha'katan, young son. Why is this? They were twins, a status which usually grants the two sons equal status. Is there some special lesson to be derived from the fact that Eisav is called the gadol and Yaakov is referred to as the katan? The Zevihler Rebbe, zl, responds with a practical analogy. A young boy was concerned about the physical condition of his grandfather. Unfortunately, his grandfather had fallen the day before. He was immediately rushed to the hospital where his status was classified as critical. The next day, the situation deteriorated even more as his grandfather became very weak and listless. On the third day, his condition worsened as he developed a fever indicating the presence of an infection. On the fourth day, his grandfather no longer was able to speak. His family surrounded his bed deeply concerned, praying for a miracle.

Observing all this, the young boy suddenly burst out in bitter weeping. His parents, understandingly perturbed, asked him, "What is wrong? Why are you crying?"

"Why should I not cry?" he countered. "I am afraid for my baby brother's life. The same things wrong with grandfather are happening to him. He also falls when he tries to walk. He also gets a fever when he is sick, and he also does not speak. These are signs that something is very seriously wrong with him."

When the parents heard this, they smiled. "My child," the father said, "A baby often falls as he learns to walk. Indeed, children develop a fever when they are sick, but it is not abnormal. And yes, he does not speak yet, but he will learn to as he matures. Your grandfather's situation is much different."

The same idea applies to Eisav the gadol and Yaakov the katan. Eisav is like an old man. When signs of illness appear, it is reason for concern, for there is little hope for recovery. When Eisav is affected by a spiritual malady, it will run its course and destroy him. Yaakov, on the other hand, is like a young child in that even when he is struck with illness, he can overcome it. The spiritual maladies such as sin and other deficiencies that challenge Yaakov will, in due time, as Yaakov "matures" be defeated, through teshuvah, repentance, and maasim tovim, good deeds.

Alternatively, we derive from here the overwhelming significance of time. Twins are born just minutes apart, yet, the first is the older one while the second is the younger one. How much younger? Five, seven, eight minutes? Does that make such a difference? Yes, because time is valuable. When they came before their father to receive the blessings, Eisav and Yaakov were both sixty-three years old. Yet, one is called the gadol and the other one is referred to as the katan. We see that we really have no idea the difference a few minutes can make.

In the Talmud Berachos 53a, Chazal relate that in the yeshivah of Rabban Gamliel, they would not say, "gezuntheit" when one sneezed. Why? It was bitul Torah; it wasted time from Torah study. How much time - half a minute? Yet, they would not respond, because even a half a minute is time!

Me'ein Ha'Shavua cites Tosfos in the Talmud Berachos 37a, which teaches us a cogent lesson regarding the meaning of time. Chazal state that if one were to soak bread in water until the water changes color because of the bread, the brachah of Borei Minei Mezonos is recited, rather than Ha'Motzi Lechem min Ha'aretz, the usual blessing made over bread, since the bread is no longer

considered bread. Now, one can only imagine the taste of this bread. Having soaked in water so long, it probably has no taste whatsoever. Yet, Tosfos tells us that Rav David m'Meitz would soak bread overnight in water so that he could eat it for breakfast the next day and not be required to make either Ha'Motzi, or Bentsh, say Grace after the meal. He did this because every minute counted as he prepared himself for his daily shiur, Torah lesson. If that is the case, why did he eat altogether? Tosfos explains that he needed the nourishment so that he could teach properly. Consider what we have just related. How long does it take to wash, make a Ha'Motzi and Bentsh? Only a few minutes. Yet, this sage would rather eat the tasteless bread than spend the few extra moments - eating.

The venerable Rosh HaYeshivah of Baranovitz, Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl, would wear shoes without laces because he did not want to waste time tying his shoes. Time is life and the value of life is inestimable. We now understand why being born a few moments earlier gives one the privilege of being referred to as the gadol.

And Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field. (25:27)

Eisav is not simply a rasha, wicked person, who performs his iniquity without a care in the world. He is not one to whom popular opinion means nothing. Chazal teach us that Eisav's nature is complex. Indeed, he wants to live a life of iniquity. On the other hand, he also wants everyone to accept and revere him. The Yerushalmi in Meseches Nedarim 8:3 says that in the future, Eisav ha'rasha will don a Tallis and seat himself together with the tzaddikim, righteous, in Gan Eden until Hashem drags him out of there. Chazal cite a pasuk in Ovadiah 1:4 which implies that Hashem will remove from his lofty perch the wicked man who raises himself as an eagle, making his nest high up among the stars. They interpret this pasuk as relating to Eisav and his desire to be accepted by the righteous.

We observe a new insight into the calibre of Eisav's chutzpah, an attitude that is prevalent among many of those who want to have their cake and eat it, too. They want to live a life of abandon. Yet, they still want to be respected and ask to sit among the righteous! Well, they had a suitable mentor - Eisav, the archetype of evil.

Returning to the Yerushalmi, we wonder how Eisav was allowed to enter Gan Eden. How did he get a "pass" to enter? Furthermore, once he is in, wrapped in his Tallis, ensconced between the righteous, is there no one who has the ability to evict him? Is it only Hashem bi'Kvodo u'be'Atzmo, in His exalted glory, who must personally drag Eisav from Gan Eden? Why is this?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, explains that, indeed, this is the case, because this is Eisav's essence. Yes, the evil Eisav also has areas in which he demonstrates piety and righteousness. So great was his performance of the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim, Honoring Father and Mother, that the greatest Tannaim asserted they could not compete with Eisav in this area. This was not the only mitzvah in which he displayed exemplary conduct. He sought to follow in the traditions of his ancestors. Yitzchak married at the age of forty; so did Eisav. He wanted to be like his father - or, at least, that is the impression he gave.

Indeed, explains Rav Ezrachi, Eisav succeeded in putting on a great show. It was all, however, merely a show. He disguised himself as Yaakov, by wrapping himself with the Tallis, as well as by performing some of his virtuous activities. He talked the talk, and he even made it appear as if he was walking the walk, but it was a sham. When Yaakov presented himself to his father wearing Eisav's clothes, Yitzchak expressed the dilemma he was facing, "The voice is that of Yaakov; yet, the hands are

those of Eisav." Ultimately, Yitzchak believed that it was Eisav who stood before him, because Yaakov could never have acted like Eisav, not even superficially. It was possible, in contrast, for Eisav to have presented himself with the kol, voice, of Yaakov.

Eisav's disguise as a tzaddik is exemplary. It is so good that he could even cheat his way into Gan Eden. He can fool everyone - except for Hashem. After all, he is Eisav. It is all a show. There is no truth, no integrity, to his virtue. Underneath the Tallis lies the evil Eisav. The evil has not changed. It has just been brilliantly concealed. Hashem knows Eisav's true personality and, therefore, yanks him out of Gan Eden. This is not a place for charlatans. The quality control is too exacting.

Yitzchak loved Eisav, because game was in his mouth. (25:28)

There is no question that Yitzchak Avinu, the Olah Temimah, Perfect Sacrifice, the Amud ho'Avodah, Pillar of Service to Hashem, was the paragon of virtue and pure piety. His total commitment to Hashem during the moments that he lay bound as a sacrifice during the Akeidas Yitzchak secured eternal atonement for Klal Yisrael. Every thought, every action, every movement was geared to, and focused on serving Hashem. Yet, we find that this great Patriarch loved Eisav, that he was prepared to grant him the eternal blessings that really should belong to Yaakov. How did it occur that Yitzchak loved such a murderer, idolater, individual who was the archetype of evil and everything reprehensible?

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebenzhal, Shlita, explains that the answer lies in the Torah's words, ki tzayid b'fiv, "because game was in his mouth." The Torah teaches us that shochad, a bribe, an allurement, any form of gratuity, has an adverse effect on a person. In other words, once one has benefited in some manner from another person - accepted a gift or has been made to feel good - he is no longer able to be impartial to his beneficiary. Understandably, Yitzchak Avinu was not aware that Eisav's surreptitious behavior was having a detrimental effect on him. He was viewing Eisav in a totally different light than what others saw in him. Make no mistake, Yitzchak was not the kind of person who falls for the average person's charlatan behavior. Eisav, however, was not your average person. He was capable of putting on such an incredible show that even Yitzchak was swayed, his impugned neutrality.

Rav Nebenzhal explains how shochad functions, how it impedes a person's ability to think rationally. Chazal interpret the word shochad as an acronym for sh'ehu chad, they are one: the benefactor and the beneficiary are one because of the gift he has accepted. If this is the case, we understand why one who accepts a bribe can no longer see with clarity of vision. For now, he and his benefactor are one. A person naturally cares about himself and, by extension, those whom he considers to be a part of himself. Just as a person does not see his own shortcomings, he, likewise, cannot see the shortcomings of he who has bribed him. They are now one entity. Eisav used his guile to convince Yitzchak that he was deserving of the blessings. Yitzchak could not see through Eisav's convincing facade because he and Eisav were now one. Just as Yitzchak was not able to see beyond himself, he could not see beyond the Eisav who presented himself before him. When you think about it, one who is bribed is in a more inferior position than one who cannot see. The individual who does not see is acutely aware of his limitations. Regrettably, the individual who is bribed thinks he has no limitations.

Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff... He, therefore, called his name Edom. (25:30)

Sforno explains that onlookers saw Eisav's total commitment to coarse, meaningless labor, not befitting a civilized man, to the extent that he was incapable of recognizing the lentils for what they represented. He only saw their color - red. Hence, called him Edom - red, which is to be understood as an imperative: "Be red by the pottage that you swallow." The name that he was given was derogatory in nature, a name which was more of a curse than an appellation. "If this is the life you want to lead, then you should be red like the stew you wish to swallow." The following story, narrated by Horav Matsiyahu Solomon, Shlita, lends a deeper insight into Sforno's words.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was known for carrying candies in his pocket to be handed out to children who either came to him for a blessing or took a bechinah, oral test, from him. The sweet candy was to impress upon the children the sweetness of Torah. Once, when Rav Matsiyahu was with Rav Shach, the Rosh Yeshivah called over his grandson and offered him a candy from a large bag of candies. "You probably want the red one," commented Rav Shach to his grandson. Hearing this, Rav Matsiyahu responded, "The rebbe is making him into an Eisav." Rav Shach's reply teaches us a lesson in chinuch, education, while it also gives us an insight into Eisav's character.

"You do not understand," Rav Shach explained. "Eisav acted like a child. A young child lives in the world of imagination, something which he is allowed to do - because of his tender age. The criticism against Eisav is that he had no business living in the olam ha'dimyon, world of imagination, the world of a child. Eisav has to live in the real world, the world of reality and truth. A mature person can no longer live a life filled with imagination. He must now use common sense and confront reality in its true nature, something Eisav refused to do. One who follows in this path, who takes the Eisav approach to life, cannot accept upon himself the concept of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. He is like a fool, gravitating to every foolish image which he or others conjure."

Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents. (25:27)

The commentators interpret yoshaiv ohalim, abiding in tents, as a reference to the ohalah shel Torah, the tent of Torah learning, the bais ha'medrash. Yaakov Avinu's entire life revolved around Torah study. The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel goes a bit further when he says Tova ulpan min kadam Hashem, "he claimed/demanded Torah from Hashem." Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, observes that the Targum Yonasan is teaching us a derech, method/manner, for Torah study. First, one must be tove'a, demand it, as if he cannot live without Torah. It is his lifeline, and he cannot let it go. Second, as the Torah writes, Yaakov was an ish, man, who was yoshaiv ohalim. His overwhelming desire to study was an integral component of his personality. It was part of his ishiyus; it defined his essence.

In addition to his inner desire to study Torah, a desire which characterized him, there was a third aspect to his Torah study which may be noted. Min kadam Hashem "[He demanded to study Torah] directly from Hashem." When Yaakov Avinu sat in front of his Gemara, he considered it as if he was sitting right in front of the Almighty. Indeed, this applies to anyone who studies Torah. At that moment, he is privileged to receive a personal Mattan Torah, Giving of the Torah, from Hashem.

In contrast, the Targum defines Eisav as the ish sadeh, man of the field, as a person who sought relaxation and free-time. One who seeks to involve himself with nothing, to squander away his time doing absolutely nothing, is slowly traveling on the road to becoming the ish sadeh personified by Eisav. We are put on this world for a purpose. To waste it with frivolous behavior, with dwindling away the precious time allotted to us by doing nothing, is to prepare oneself for the materialism and

debauchery that characterized Eisav. A Jew is to toil in Torah and in spiritual endeavor. A vacation is for the purpose of rejuvenation of the spirit and the emotion. It avails one the opportunity for continued spiritual growth - something in which Eisav was not interested.

"Pour into me, now, some of the very red stuff for I am exhausted." (25:30)

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, makes a powerful observation. Yaakov Avinu had been spending his life studying Torah, far removed from the materialistic world in which Eisav, his brother, lived and thrived. He lived simply, subsisting only on the very basic necessities. Eisav, on the other hand, lived off the fat of the land. He hunted and ate to his heart's content. Yet, we see how Hashem guides the world and the fortune of man. He designed the situation so that Eisav would be exhausted and so hungry that the only one to whom he could turn in his moment of need was none other than Yaakov! He was so beholden to Yaakov that he sold his birthright for a bowl of red lentils! This is how Hashem switches around the roles. Everything is suddenly topsy turvy. The one who thought he was on top of the world is, in the flash of an eye, cast into the role of begging for food - from the very person whom he had, until now, scorned. Yaakov, the yeshivah bachur, became the benefactor, and Eisav, his beneficiary.

Hashem's ways are not for us to comprehend. They are beyond the rationale of our limited minds. Even today, His People are considered by the rest of the world as being nebechlech, unfortunate ones. This is supposed to be especially true of the chareidi, observant Jew. A day will soon come when it will change. When Hashem will so decide, suddenly the nations of the world will realize who we are and what it is that distinguishes us from them. Until that moment arrives, we can just wait anxiously and believe in its advent.

He cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry. (27:34)

Chazal tell us that Eisav cried three tears, each alluded to in the pasuk: "he cried out"; "exceedingly great", "bitter." They say that Moshiach Tzidkeinu will not arrive to liberate us from our present exile until the tears of Eisav have ended. This is both a compelling and condemning statement. Why should Hashem be concerned about Eisav's tears? What about our tears? Have we not cried enough over the last two thousand years - and Moshiach still has not come? Horav Shmelke zl, m'Nikolsburg gives an interesting response based upon the halachic axiom of min b'mino afilu b'elef lo batil, "a species mixed with its own type is not considered nullified, even if there is a ratio of one to a thousand." While, under most circumstances, annulment occurs if two unlike species mix with a ratio of 60 parts to one, if they are of the same specie, this rule does not apply.

The tears of Eisav were specifically in response to olam hazeh, this materialistic world and matters relating to it. He did not care about his spiritual dimension. He prioritized the physical dimension and all it had to offer. When our tears are shed for material losses, for matters that concern us in this materialistic world, they are similar to Eisav's tears, and hence, we cannot overwhelm them. It is only when we shed tears for matters relating to Hashem, for matters relevant to the spiritual, Hashem's sovereignty over the world, when we cry about the Shechinah's exile - not just about our own - then our tears are different from Eisav's, such that we have the power to annul them.

It is true that the righteous cry for the right concerns; they cry for Hashem, but their love for all Jews is so great that they also pray for the material welfare of the Jewish People. In order to nullify the power of Eisav's tears, we must see to it that we cry for the right purpose.

In an alternative explanation, I think the issue is, what about Eisav's tears gives them such a deleterious effect against us? He cried - we cry constantly. What makes his tears so special? First, it is not the actual tears that are so castigating, it is the fact that we/Yaakov inadvertently caused them. To make another person cry is terribly odious. When a person cries, he releases his inner emotions; he loses control and expresses his hurt and pain. To be the cause of such a loss of emotion is particularly detestable. In Yaakov Avinu's situation, he certainly did nothing wrong. On the Heavenly barometer of judgment, however, he was party to a situation wherein another person, albeit an evil one, was brought to tears. This is held over the heads of his descendants until we correct the hurt and make sure that we are not responsible for another person's pain.

In yet a third approach, we suggest that Eisav's tears were unique. How often do we cry when we do not receive a blessing? We cry when we are in pain, when we hurt. Eisav cried because he did not receive something positive, his father's blessing. This is a lofty form of tear, one that should be envied. Do we cry when we do not understand the Gemara? Do we cry when we have missed out on an opportunity to daven with a Minyan? Do we cry when we have missed a great shiur or shmues, Torah lecture or ethical discourse? Eisav cried because he missed out on a blessing. Do we do the same? Regrettably, the Jew has no shortage of reasons for which to cry. We derive from here that there are priorities even in expressing emotion.

And these are the offspring of Yitzchak ben Avraham. (25:19)

While the narrative in Parashas Toldos addresses the life and accomplishments of Yaakov Avinu, its scope pales in comparison to the space devoted to the lives of Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak lived longer than both his father and his son; yet, much less space is dedicated to his life. The Rambam reinforces this pattern, by devoting considerable space to Avraham's achievements in the area of outreach to the pagans. Similarly, he writes that Yaakov sanctified Hashem's Name through harbotzas Torah, dissemination of Torah teachings. Regarding Yitzchak, he writes simply that he studied and mandated his son, Yaakov, to transmit his teachings to the world. Thus, in comparison to Avraham and Yaakov, Yitzchak's spiritual activity in relation to the outside appears diminished. While Avraham and Yaakov reached out to thousands, Yitzchak had only one talmid, disciple: Yaakov.

Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl, explains that the distinctions in the diversity of activities manifest by each of the Avos, Patriarchs, is to be understood in light of the differences in the manner that each spread emunah, faith in Hashem, which was an outgrowth of the uniqueness of his respective mission. We are accustomed to thinking that Avraham left his door open to the world, encouraging everyone to share his bread. When they conveyed their gratitude in response, he would instruct them to offer their gratitude to Hashem. While this is true, his manner of outreach was a little more complicated.

Avraham's avodah, service, was founded in his awe before Hashem's unceasing flow of chesed, kindness. Avraham saw his own role as exemplifying this character trait, teaching it to the world. When his guests expressed their gratitude for his generosity, they also marveled at his nobility of character.

He would explain that his acts of altruism were a form of Divine service, which reflected the beneficence of the Almighty. This is a character trait that all of Hashem's creations should emulate. Indeed, the idea of a religion based upon kindness and altruism was attractive to the many thousands whom Avraham introduced to monotheism.

Yaakov's mode of avodah was Torah study as a pursuit of eternal truth. Although, his approach was clearly more restrictive than that of Avraham, he nonetheless did reach out to a multitude of adherents, people who came to form the first yeshivah. Yitzchak's approach to Avodas Hashem reflected middas HaDin, the attribute of strict justice. This required total discipline, living life as fully as possible within the most exacting demands of Hashem's will, self-abnegation to the point that he was prepared to give up his life at the Akeidah - if this was Hashem's will. This type of service was certainly not as popular as that of the other two. Yitzchak attracted one faithful student - Yaakov. Yitzchak's yeshivah of "one" constituted the Patriarch's outreach to the world. Thus, his activities were not acknowledged with as much fanfare as those of Avraham and Yaakov.

The lifework of each Av is recorded in consonance with his individual success. The long-term success of the Patriarchs' dissemination of emunah in Hashem can be appreciated by noting how deeply the lessons of each has become indelibly ingrained in the Jew's national character. Yitzchak's lesson of self-negation to the point of self-sacrifice has surfaced in every era of Jewish history. Indeed, our readiness to sacrifice our lives for the Jewish ideal has been manifest in even the most dubious circumstances by the most improbable Jews. Our willingness to die for our beliefs has been the source of our survival.

A well-known incident that occurred in the early days of the Russian revolution demonstrates this idea. A band of outlaws entered the Russian hamlet of Machanov'ke, rounding up the town's thirty-seven Jews with one thing in mind: to kill them. The townspeople, who had lost no love for the Jews, were all there to witness the atrocity. As the robbers picked up their rifles to begin the "proceedings," a voice shouted from the crowd, "I am also a Jew!" It was a pharmacist who had been living in town for years, whom no one, neither Jew nor gentile, had ever suspected of being Jewish. One wonders why this man, who had so completely assimilated into Christian life, suddenly - after so many years of being estranged from his people - had come back, especially when doing so meant certain death. Rav Yaakov suggests that he was responding to his innate Jewish willingness to surrender his life to affirm his commitment to Hashem. Yitzchak's seminal act at the Akeidah imbued a spirit of self-sacrifice in the Jewish psyche that has remained integral until this very day.

The robbers fired their guns in the air and released the Jews - only to gather them back to the village square once again to repeat the ruse. They repeated the charade, finally letting the Jewish citizens go free. Perhaps it was the zechus, merit, of the Jewish pharmacist, who dramatically awoke to his true identity, that saved the Jews that day.

Yitzchak loved Eisav...but Rivkah loved Yaakov. (25:28)

Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, asks a number of compelling questions concerning Yitzchak Avinu's relationship with Eisav. First, why did Yitzchak love Eisav? He certainly must have known that this son was far from the ideal. Why would he want to impart the berachos, blessings, to him - instead of Yaakov? Moreover, Chazal tell us that on the day Avraham died, Eisav transgressed five sins, among which was the sin of denying the existence of the Creator. Is this the kind of person that should have

received the berachos? Second, how did Eisav turn into an apostate after being raised in Yitzchak's home? He was fifteen years old when Avraham Avinu died. He apparently had experienced an unparalleled exposure to ruchnius, spirituality. Yet, he became an apikores, apostate. How did this happen? Last, if Eisav did not believe in Hashem, why did he grieve so bitterly over losing the berachos?

Rav Aharon explains that Eisav undoubtedly had developed an acute awareness of Hashem. He, therefore, realized that losing the berachos meant losing a treasure of inestimable value. As we have pointed out previously, one could not have grown up in a home that was so suffused with spirituality and not build a strong understanding and appreciation of Hashem. Eisav was aware and understood but, nonetheless, he did not care. Kofer b'Ikar means that a person knows, yet denies. The reason for this is that in order for man to be a baal bechirah, have the ability to choose equally between right and wrong, good and evil, he must not be predisposed more to one side than to the other. Consequently, one who is very righteous, who has a profound understanding of Hashem, must have a yetzer hora, evil-inclination, that is equally powerful, that has the guile and ability to sway him away from his beliefs. How does a great person with a deep perception of the Almighty fall prey to the yetzer hora? The answer is clear: the yetzer hora, in his case, is armed with special weaponry. It can entice him to turn to his base desires to the point that he is prepared to throw away his opportunity for achieving eternity. Chazal teach us that the wicked are aware that in the end they must confront their own mortality. Despite this, their evil-inclination entices them to have a "good time" until the end.

Eisav's perception of the Almighty was sublime. Even so, he chose to live a life dedicated to materialism, debauchery and licentiousness. He knew better, but he did not care. He disregarded Hashem, because he wanted to live a lifestyle that was base and meaningless. This is why his "head" is buried in the Meoras Ha'Machpeilah. His mind was aware, but his body did not care. He had the "head" of a Torah Jew, but lived the life of a pagan. He chose to satisfy his physical desires. He was great, but so was his yetzer hora. The yetzer hora was victorious.

Yitzchak knew the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. He still, however, wanted to give the blessings to Eisav. Yaakov was spiritually pure, his sanctity unimpaired by any materialistic concerns or desires. His sons followed in his hallowed nature. They were destined to form the nation that would be a mamleches Kohanim, Nation of Priests, and goi Kadosh, Holy Nation. If Eisav and his descendants were to be bequeathed the material blessings of Eretz Yisrael they would be able to share in Yaakov's holy work by sustaining him and his descendants. In this way, Eisav would not be eternally severed from the Patriarchal heritage. He would not be a "Yaakov," but he still would not have descended to the nadir that he did. Rivkah, however, saw that regardless of the positive influence on Eisav, it was not worth the risk for Yaakov to be subordinated and subservient to him in any way. Yaakov must be completely divorced from Eisav. This is why she wanted Yaakov to be independent of Eisav and be the sole beneficiary of Yitzchak's blessings. Apparently, Hashem agreed with her.

And he called them by the same names that his father had called them. (26:18)

Yitzchak Avinu dug up the wells that the Philistines had stopped up. He then called them by the same names that his father, Avraham, had called. Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, compared the emergence of the "yeshivos" that were rebuilt after the Holocaust to Yitzchak's wells. In the previous pasuk, the Torah writes, "And Yitzchak dug anew the wells of water...the Philistines had stopped up." The yeshivos that taught Torah, the fountain of life of the Jewish people, which were originally

founded in Europe by Avraham Avinu's descendants, the Roshei Hayeshivah, were "stopped up" by the Nazis. Those wellsprings of Torah were dug anew in Eretz Yisrael and were given the same names of Mir, Slabodka and Ponevez. We may add that it was not only out of respect that these names were carried forward. It was to emphasize that the derech halimud v'hachaim, the manner of Torah study and the lifestyle that was inherent in these yeshivos, did not die. It had been transplanted to another place with renewed vigor and vibrancy.

In truth, these bastions of Torah constitute the fountainhead of Torah in Eretz Yisrael and throughout the world. They are what gives a place distinction. They are what gives it its size. The Alter, zl, m'Slabodka was wont to say that just as there is a world map that points out where every country is located, so, too, is there a spiritual map. There is a difference between the two in regard to distinguishing one city/country from another. In the standard world map, many small cities/towns are either not marked or they are marked with a tiny dot. This is due to their miniscule population. The size of the dot denotes the population and significance of a place. The spiritual map is different: it does not place significance on population, but, rather, on spiritual influence. The dots on the global map for the cities of Radin, Mir, Telz, Ponevez were probably very tiny, if they existed at all. On the spiritual map, in contrast, they were mammoth, because these small towns had a spiritual influence that outshined that of many of the largest cities. Furthermore, we may add that if a small town produces a Torah giant whose influence reaches out on a global level, he gives his hometown unparalleled distinction. Man's perspective must be guided by Torah orientation if he is to see any given situation with clarity and truth.

Rivkah said to Yitzchak, "I am disgusted with my life on account of the daughters of Cheis." (27:46)

The way parents act - between themselves and in regard to their children - leaves an enduring impression. When Rivkah told Yitzchak that she wanted Yaakov to leave home, she said that there was no way he could find a suitable wife among the Bnos Cheis. On the other hand, she told Yaakov that she had instructed him to leave because Eisav sought to kill him. Why did she not tell Yitzchak the truth, that it was revealed to her b'Ruach Hakodesh, with Divine Inspiration, that Eisav was preparing to do away with his competition? The Ohr Ha'Chaim Hakadosh explains that Rivkah did not want to become a talebearer by relating to Yitzchak the evil intentions of their son, Eisav. If she could make do by simply telling him that it was for shidduch purposes, it would be more appropriate. To Yaakov, however, she told the primary reason: that Eisav was pursuing him. She could not take any chances that Yaakov might remain. His life was in danger, and it was necessary to impress this upon him. When a mother is sensitive to all of the laws of the Torah, it is no wonder that she raises a son like Yaakov Avinu.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, derives a powerful lesson in how parents should speak to their children from the dialogue between Yitzchak and Yaakov. When Yitzchak "encouraged" Yaakov to leave home and go to seek a wife, he had specific criteria concerning who this wife should be. She could not be from the Bnos Canaan, and it would be best that she be from Rivkah's family in Padan Aram. Interestingly, when Yitzchak instructed Yaakov concerning whom not to marry, he preceded his negative command with a blessing. He then said, "Do not take a wife from the Canaanite daughters." Why did he couch his instructions to leave with a blessing? Would it not have been more appropriate to first instruct him to leave and then to bless him prior to his trip?

Rav Zilberstein infers from here a valuable lesson in education and parenting. When Yitzchak

commanded Yaakov to marry only from a specific milieu, he placed some very clear restrictions upon him. By limiting Yaakov to a specific group of people, Yitzchak was imposing a lot on his son. Perhaps he would not find a wife to his satisfaction among Rivkah's family. Who says that Lavan would agree to the match? Therefore, before Yitzchak could impose these restrictions on his son, he blessed him. Doing this would render his command more palatable and would insure its acceptance.

What a contrast for those parents who feel that the only way to raise their children is by exercising an iron fist. Placing restrictions and imposing obstacles every step of the way will only strain a relationship. While it is true that it is necessary to lay down the rules and that some rules must be inflexible, there is a way to present these rules on a positive note. Give the blessing of good will before you send the child to a corner. This way, he will at least realize that your intentions are noble.

The children agitated within her. (25:22) Rashi relates the source of Rivkah's "agitation." When she walked by a bais hamedrash, Yaakov would run to come out; and when she walked by a house of idol worship, Eisav would fight to leave. She was concerned: What kind of a child am I bearing? If one moment he attempts to go to the bais hamedrash and the next moment he is gravitating to the idols, he must be a confused child. When she was told that she was carrying twins, each with his own unique proclivities -- one to Torah and the other to idol worship -- she was calmed. She could deal with a child that was evil. A child who was mixed up, who attempted to transverse both worlds, was beyond her understanding. She felt that she would not be able to reach him, since he would not be able to realize that he had done anything wrong. There is hope for the undisputedly wicked. There is no hope for he who is spiritually crippled, for he cannot recognize his deficiency. He can, therefore, not repent.

I was always bothered by this exegesis. After all, if one goes to the bais hamedrash, should it not have some effect on him? Do we not see many people of all ages, many of whom have not yet become observant, spending time in the bais hamedrash studying Torah as a prelude to increasing their religious observance? Why does Rivkah presumably "write off" the son that simultaneously leans towards both the bais hamedrash and the house of idol worship?

We can respond simply that one questions the sincerity of an individual who gravitates to both. Does he really care about the Torah study in the bais hamedrash? If he sincerely does, why is he also visiting the idols? He is either insincere and living a life of sham, putting on an act, or he is truly spiritually and emotionally crippled, a truly mixed up individual who cannot get his act together. In both situations, he needs serious help to make up his mind as to which derech, path, he wants to follow. It can only be one. The one who is sincere about his Torah study -- who is searching for the proper path and whose focus is positive -- should be encouraged until he is able to break away completely from his idols.

Alternatively, the Ozrover Rebbe, zl, suggests another approach in understanding the dual gravitation. Rivkah feared that when the child within her turned to the bais hamedrash, it was for his own vested interest. Even his pull to the bais hamedrash was motivated by idol worship. One that turns to the bais hamedrash and to the house of idol worship really never leaves his idols. They control his attitude for the bais hamedrash. One who serves Hashem should do so with sincerity and integrity, for Hashem's "sake," rather than for personal gain, even spiritual gain. Injecting a bit of ourselves into the service detracts and diminishes from the true lofty goal one should struggle to fulfill.

And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth. (27:28)

Rashi notes that the pasuk at the onset of the text of the blessings begins with the conjunction vav, which means "and," a word which is not consistent with the commencement of blessings. He cites the Midrash which states that this refers to a continuous repetitive action, as if to say, "May G-d grant you the following blessing over and over again." The question is obvious and well known. When the Torah says, "V'yiten lecha," "and may G-d give you," it already implies constant giving. If so, why do we need Rashi's comment of yachzor v'yiten, "He will then return and give again"? When one is blessed with abundance, it is not necessary to say, "May G-d give you abundance" - and may G-d give you abundance - again, because it is obvious that consistency is part of the blessing.

The Piaszesner Rebbe, zl, gives two answers to this question. First, he explains the meaning of "giving." When a person gives his friend money for the first time, then he is indeed the giver. If, however, the recipient had previously given the money to the giver who is presently giving it back, then the giver is only returning what he had previously received.

We worship Hashem out of devotion to Him - not for reward or personal gain. Nonetheless, when a Jew serves Hashem, he warrants a reward, which he will certainly receive. Hence, the reward Hashem gives him is in return for his devotion to Him. If, however, Hashem were to confer reward upon reward upon one who is not deserving of reward, then He is really the giver.

When Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, he said, "V'yitein lecha," "And may (G-d) give you." This means that first Hashem will give - even if the Jew is not deserving of this reward. Then, "He will return and give you again." At this time, Hashem is giving in return for what the person has already given through his worship. The Rebbe adds that this is only right, since, after all, how can anyone properly worship Hashem amidst pain and suffering, unless Hashem has already given first? It is only when Hashem gives to the "undeserving" Jew that afterwards the giving can be on a level of reciprocity. The point is made especially clear when we note that this homily was being delivered amidst the anguish of the concentration camp, to the broken shards of humanity that still remained.

In an alternative exegesis, the Rebbe once again takes into consideration the pain and deprivation that had regrettably become a way of life for the European Jew. He cites the pasuk in Yeshaya 28:13, "They will come those who are lost in the land of Ashur, and those who are outcast in the land of Egypt." There are people who are really ovdim, lost, and there are those who are simply nidachim, outcast. The nidach, outcast person, has merely been displaced, exiled from his home to another place, but he can still be noticed and recognized. Not so the one who is lost. He is neither visible nor recognizable.

In speaking to his "congregation" of tzibrochoneh Yidden, broken Jews, the Rebbe made reference to their current situation, in which Jewish men had their beards and payos shorn off, becoming externally unrecognizable as Jews. As the terrible persecutions and tortures beyond description persisted, it became apparent that they were losing their inner fortitude. They were now becoming internally unrecognizable as Jews as well. Indeed, in such terrible circumstances, a person may lose himself completely, to the point that he does not even recognize himself at all. The Rebbe's words in Yiddish were, "Ehr farlirt zich a'lien", "He loses himself." No longer can he remember how he felt on Shabbos a year ago, or how he felt during the week when he prayed to Hashem. The emotional and spiritual elation that he experienced when he communed with the Almighty was something far-removed from his current situation. He had been stepped upon and crushed until he no longer held onto any sensitivity regarding his Jewishness. Indeed, he no longer knew if he was a human being or an animal. This is the level of being truly lost and absent.

This form of psychic disintegration was something which many of the ghetto's inhabitants

experienced. The Rebbe explains that the term *ovdim*, lost, refers not to the spatial -- but to the psychological -- dimension. When the Rebbe spoke these words, they conveyed a message of hope. People realized that they were not alone in what they were experiencing. By identifying the syndrome, it became easier to attempt to ameliorate it.

He concluded with a message of hope and faith in Hashem. In the Talmud Kiddushin 2b, Chazal say, "The loser must return in search of his lost article." When something is truly lost, when it cannot be seen or recognized, its owner returns to search for it, to locate it, to bring it to back to him.

Hashem is our owner, and we are His lost articles. He will search for us and find us. He will reinstate us and give us everything that is good. This is the meaning of Yitzchak's blessing. Hashem will give not only when the Jew is visible and recognizable, but also when he is lost, when he is neither discernible not identifiable as a Jew. At such times, Hashem will "return" and give again. The Owner of the *aveidah*, lost object, will return to search for us and find us. He will shower us with good and bring us close to Him as He redeems us with great compassion.

To the broken and tormented Jew of the Holocaust, Yitzchak's blessing signaled hope. It was a clarion call that reverberated throughout his entire soul. It gave him reason to want to live. He knew that whatever happened, he would be going "home." Perhaps this homily extends far beyond the era of the Holocaust, even to the contemporary Jew who has strayed so far that he is also "lost," the "invisible" Jew who no longer identifies with his people. Can one become more lost than that?

When Eisav was forty years old, he took a wife...and they were a source of spiritual rebellion to Yitzchak and Rivkah. (25:34,35)

Eisav followed in his father's ways by marrying at the age of forty. That is all that he did like his father. The women he married were from a nation whose evil nature and low moral standard equaled that of Eisav. Indeed, with these marriages, Eisav forever broke his ties with Avraham Avinu's mission. The Torah states that these women were a source of spiritual rebellion to Yitzchak and Rivkah. "Why does Yitzchak's name precede Rivkah's?" queries the Midrash. They respond that Yitzchak was much more affected by the spiritual filth of idol worship that Eisav's wives brought into their house than Rivkah was. Yitzchak descended from *kedoshim*, holy, virtuous parents who left a lasting imprint of holiness and purity on him. Rivkah came from a house that was a center for idolatry, thereby dulling her sensitivity to the impurity of idol worship.

Let us attempt to digest the words of the Midrash. When Rivkah left her father's home, she was three years old. Even at that young age, she was exemplary in her virtue and piety. Indeed, Chazal refer to her as a rose among thorns. As soon as she arrived in Yitzchak's home, those spiritual amenities that had ceased as a result of Sarah Imeinu's death, returned. At the time of Eisav's marriage, Rivkah had already spent sixty years in Yitzchak's home. She was acutely aware of what Eisav was, the evil that he wrought and the malevolence that he embodied - more aware than Yitzchak. Yet, the Midrash claims that her sensitivity to the filth of idol worship was not as acute as Yitzchak's. Is it that the three years spent by the *tzadeikas* in her father's home had an everlasting and detrimental effect on her?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, explains this phenomenon in the following manner. He cites Chazal in the *Yerushalmi Chagiga* 2:1 who explain the *pasuk* in *Koheles* 7:8, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning." When is the "end" better? Only when it is good from the "beginning." A tree that is developed can be moved to another place, and flourish transplanted, even if the conditions are not

exactly suitable for it. A young shoot's future growth and strength, on the other hand, is determined by the earth in which it had originally been planted. It can only survive in an area similar to its original planting.

This idea applies similarity to Rivkah. The sensitivities that were ingrained in her as a young child left an indelible impression - one that is not superceded by her righteousness, moral character, and many years of living in the home of Avraham and Yitzchak. The impression was ingrained in her psyche. Growing up, even for three years -- but three years of impressionable youth -- leaves a taint. She did not abhor the idol worship of her daughter-in-law, as much as her husband Yitzchak did.

Rav Goldvicht submits that this is the defining point in understanding the difference between a tzaddik ben tzaddik and a tzaddik ben rashah, a righteous son of righteous lineage and a righteous son who has overcome the evil effect of his evil forbears. Without a doubt, the righteous son who triumphed over his environment and lineage deserves tremendous credit. He is strong; he is resolute, he has achieved what a tzaddik ben tzaddik could not achieve. He withstood trial by fire and prevailed. Yet, the righteous son who grew up in an environment alien to virtue, antithetical of moral rectitude, devoted to idol worship in its many forms, cannot achieve the shleimus taharas hanefesh, perfect purity of soul, as the tzaddik ben tzaddik. His psyche has been desensitized, in a sense, to certain evil, to the point that he will not feel the same negativity and abhorrence as his counterpart.

This makes one's youth, his early years in yeshivah, his teenage years followed by his tenure in bais hamedrash, so much more crucial. It is the defining moment in his life. It is the time that leaves the most indelible imprimatur on him, his character, both spiritual and moral. The way he davens, his approach to studying Torah; his attitude towards mussar, ethical discourse; in fact, the entire time spent in the yeshivah will determine what type of observant adult he will be. "The end of a matter is better than the beginning" - only if the beginning is good.

*Eisav harbored hatred toward Yaakov because of the blessing wherewith his father had blessed him.
(27:41)*

The Ozrover Rebbe, zl, notes the deep-seated hatred that Eisav manifest for Yaakov. The Torah writes that Eisav hated Yaakov because of the blessing that his father had given him. It had nothing to do with Yaakov's taking the blessing away from Eisav. The mere fact that Yaakov was blessed was enough to ignite this inexplicable hatred within Eisav. We now understand Chazal's axiom, "Halachah, it is a halachic maxim that Eisav hates Yaakov." This means that Eisav's hatred has no rationale. A halachah is a rule or statement, which at times defies rationale. It is an absolute which transcends human reason and intellect. Likewise, Eisav's hatred is inscrutable. Evil hates good - Eisav hates Yaakov. There was no reason for Eisav to hate Yaakov. The bechorah, birthright, was sold. Whatever Yaakov received from his father was his by right. So, what was Eisav's problem? It bothered him that Yaakov received a blessing. He could not "fargin" - brook the fact that Yaakov had anything - period - let alone a blessing.

This is the type of hatred we have endured for thousands of years. We must remember, however, that this type of acrimony is endemic only to Eisav - not to Yishmael. While the Arab world may hate us, it is not the hatred of Eisav. The Arabs want land. They are a nation because that is their legacy from Yishmael. At least they have something which they wrongfully claim is "theirs." It is the children of Eisav, the Christian world, who vilify us for no reason and for no practical gain, that should concern

us. The world that stands idly by while Jewish blood is spilled; the children of Eisav and Amalek who have slaughtered us simply because we were Jewish - they are the ones about whom we should be concerned. We are the blessed people and that is why they curse us.

Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivkah, daughter of Besuel... sister of Lavan the Aramean, a wife for himself. (25:20)

Why does the Torah detail Rivkah's "illustrious" lineage. Furthermore, it is understandable to mention her father, but why does it also mention her brother? Also, why does the Torah emphasize that he was Lavan ho'Arami, the ramai, swindler? The Chasam Sofer offers a practical response to these questions. He explains that Yitzchak Avinu had a positive reason for this action. He had studied all of his Torah from his father, Avraham Avinu. Indeed, he had much in common with his father. There was, however, a tremendous gap between the two in one area. Avraham was the son of Terach, an idol-worshiper of reknown, while Yitzchak was the son of a tzaddik. The fact that Avraham was able to achieve such spiritual distinction, to triumph over his adverse roots, was an accomplishment to which Yitzchak, his son, could not easily relate. After all, he was different. He had been raised and educated in an environment that was replete in Torah, fear of Heaven, and chesed, loving-kindness. The holiness that permeated his home was exceptional. Yitzchak's background was certainly much different from that of his father.

It was only now, after Yitzchak married Rivkah, the daughter of the wicked Besuel, the sister of the treacherous Lavan, that he was compelled to confront the world of the tzaddik ben rasha, righteous son of a wicked person. He could now learn from his wife, who was k'gufo, like his own self, what it was like to wage a constant battle with one's environment.

With his marriage, he became a "ben arba'im," a "forty-year old" - not only in years, but as Chazal in Pirkei Avos say, "Ben arbaim le'binah," "A forty-year old attains understanding." This is the homiletic meaning of the pasuk, "And Yitzchak was forty years old when he married Rivkah." When he married Rivkah, he achieved a level of understanding that had eluded him before. Now he was a "ben arbaim le'binah." He possessed the necessary understanding essential for attaining the status of a "ben-arbaim."

And the children agitated within her. (25:22)

The Midrash Rabba explains the source of this "agitation." (Apparently, in citing this Midrash, Rashi must have had a different girsa, version.) When Rivka would stand in the vicinity of a shul or a bais ha'medrash, while she was pregnant, Yaakov would struggle to leave, and when she passed by a house of idol-worship, Eisav would run and struggle to leave. Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, notes the difference in Chazal's vernacular in describing Yaakov's and Eisav's attempts to leave. First, they say that Rivkah stood at the shul while she passed-by the house of idol-worship. Then, Chazal say that Eisav ran and struggled to leave. By the time he sensed that he was at a makom tumah, place of spiritual contamination, Rivkah was already passing it by. Thus, he would have to "run" to get back there. Yaakov, on the other hand, was not in a rush, since Rivkah would stand/take her time when she

was near a bais ha'medrash.

Rav Zalmen derives from this explanation that in this world, the forces of tumah are stronger and more intense than the forces of kedushah, holiness. Eisav was so intent on going to the house of idol-worship that he "ran," literally "pushed" to get out, while Yaakov just struggled to leave. Even though Yaakov had time, since his mother did not rush by, he nonetheless did not seem to be as obsessed with getting to the bais ha'medrash as Eisav was with getting to his makom tumah. In explaining Yaakov's declaration later, in the beginning of Parashas Vayishlach, that "I did not learn from his (Lavan's) evil ways," the commentators indicate that Yaakov was bemoaning the fact that he did not learn from Eisav's "religious" fervor and enthusiasm in serving his idols. "Eisav" runs to his tumah, while we dally along on our way to shul and Torah study. This analysis does not advocate religious fanaticism, rather, it only encourages deriving a positive lesson for our own avodas hakodesh, religious service.

The commentators raise a question regarding Rivkah's predicament: If she suffered so much when she went out, why did she not simply stay home? They respond that at home it was worse! Rav Zalmen explains that at least when she went out only one child gave her a difficult time, while the other one "turned his head away," ignoring his counter-part's religious edifice. At home, however, they agitated one another. Perhaps this is why she went to the bais ha'medrash, to seek out Hashem's advice. First, as a tzaddeikas, righteous woman, she gravitated to the bais ha'medrash. Second, there she could at least relax and take her time. She did not have to rush by. Last, at the bais ha'medrash Yaakov was pushing her, while at the tumah, Eisav was causing her pain. She would much rather sustain the pain caused by Yaakov's compulsion to go to the bais ha'medrash than Eisav's gravitation to his tumah.

And Yitzchak dug anew the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Avraham his father and the Plishtim had stopped up after Avraham's death; and he called them by the names that his father called them. (26:8)

"The Nazi murderers did more than destroy the wells of Torah and cause the sound of Torah to cease in Europe. They also stopped them with dirt, as they killed those who studied and disseminated Torah, so that there could no longer arise a generation of lomdei Torah, those who study Torah." These were the words of Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, in reference to the post-World War II architect and master-builder of Torah in Eretz Yisrael, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, the Ponevezer Rav. Not only did the Rav redig the wells of Torah and transplant them to the Holy Land, he even gave them their original names. This is the underlying meaning of Chazal's statement, "In the future, the batei Medrash of chutz laaretz, Diaspora, will be established in Eretz Yisrael."

The Ponevezer Rav was a remarkable individual whose dedication to rebuilding Torah was legendary. In 1943, during the height of construction of Yeshivas Ponevez, the Rav became ill. Concerned about a serious infection in his throat, the doctor prescribed complete bed rest and prohibited him from speaking. Hearing this advice, the Rav forced himself to sit up in bed and whispered the following: "Let it be known that the Lithuanian farmer is very lazy. It is very difficult to get him to move, to do anything. Yet, when it is the time of the harvest, he transforms into an incredibly industrious, hard-working person. Indeed, if the skies begin to get dark and rain is imminent, the farmer will race like a whirlwind to complete the harvest prior to the rain."

"Why, then, do you not understand me and my mission? It is the middle of the harvest; the sky

is bleak and cloudy; the rain is threatening. All my work will be to waste. Do you expect me to lay down and rest?"

This attitude prevailed in every Rosh Yeshivah who was fortunate to build Torah. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, was wont to say, "The world thinks that a yeshivah is built with money. This is not true. To build a yeshivah one needs three things: The place must be appropriate and suitable; one must have taharas ha'leiv, purity of heart; one must shed tears".

Horav Chaim Volozhiner, the father of the yeshivah world, built his famous yeshivah with such tears. The fear and trepidation that Rav Chaim manifest when he undertook to build a yeshivah was the mainstay of its foundation. Indeed, it has been recorded that prior to laying the even ha'pinah, foundation stone, for the bais ha'medrash, Rav Chaim was so overcome with weeping that it was not necessary to use water to mix the cement. His tears were sufficient. Many Roshei Yeshivah would fast and pray fervently before they opened their yeshivos. Perhaps this is why they succeeded so well in disseminating Torah to the masses.

He called its name Rechovos, and said, for now Hashem has granted us ample space, and we can be fruitful in the land. He went up from there to Beer-Sheva. (26:23,24)

Yitzchak Avinu was finally able to rest. The hostility of the Plishtim had forced him into isolation. There was finally peace. Yitzchak was now able to relax and undertake the life's work of a Jew - an endeavor that was originally undertaken by his father, Avraham Avinu. What motivated his decision to continue traveling to Beer Sheva? While it is true that Yitzchak had been forced into isolation, compelled to remain within the confines of the ghetto, this reality was to his advantage. Separatism has a positive effect on the Jew. He is not exposed to the pagan environment, characterized by loose morals and perverted spirituality. Why would he want to move on? Why not leave "well enough" alone?

Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, explains that until this juncture, Yitzchak had been spiritually protected because of his "forced" sheltered environment. What about the legacy of the Jew: to reach out to others, to call out in the Name of Hashem? This is why when he "reached" a state of "Rechovos," when the hostility towards him had subsided and the ghetto gates had risen, Yitzchak was now prepared to go out and follow in his father's path. It is at this point that Hashem appeared to him to protect him. He harbored the fear that this new situation, with its openness and freedom, would lead to a relationship that might be detrimental to him personally. Yitzchak conjectured that only in Beer Sheva, the place where he was educated, where he saw his father's approach to reaching out to a pagan world, would he be blessed with Hashem's special protection. This is exactly what happened. Hashem appeared to Yitzchak and assured him of the future - if he would follow in his father's path. Immediately upon hearing this, Yitzchak erected a mizbayach, altar, and began to call out in the Name of Hashem. Interestingly, everything started happening on its own. He did not have to examine the nature of the soil or make sure that water was available in sufficient quantity. His men found water on their first attempt. Suddenly, the king who had shunned him came to him to make a covenant. Why did everything change almost overnight? Simply, it reflected Hashem's blessing.

This idea applies to us, as well. When we follow in the prescribed path that engenders Hashem's blessing, we will see how everything just "seems" to work out.

And Yitzchak said to Yaakov, "Come close, if you please, so I can feel you, my son; are you, indeed, my son Eisav, or not?" (27:21)

When Yitzchak asked Yaakov to come closer, so that he could touch him to "sense" if he "felt" like Eisav, Yaakov shook with fear. His heart seemed to melt like wax. Chazal tell us that Hashem summoned two angels, one to stand on Yaakov's right side and one to stand on his left side to hold him up by the shoulders - so nervous was he. We wonder why Yaakov was so shaken by his father's desire to confirm that he was Eisav. Did he not hear from his mother that she had received a prophetic vision verifying that Yitzchak's blessings belonged to him? Furthermore, it was Hashem's will that Yaakov should be the beneficiary of these blessings. He knew that the angels were dispatched by Hashem to support him. Nonetheless, Yaakov was shaken to the point that he needed angels to hold him up! Why? What brought about this uncontrollable fear and anxiety?

Horav Shalom Schwarzon, zl, offers a penetrating insight into Yaakov Avinu's spiritual persona. No, he did not fear a curse, because his mother had assured him that it was the will of G-d that he receive the blessing - and not Eisav. He feared something else: something that might be unusual for us, but for Yaakov Avinu, it was a real fear, a fear that shook him so that he needed the support of angels to stand up. Yaakov feared tainting the mitzvah of Kibbud Av, honoring his father. If his father had discovered that he was not Eisav, he would have offended him by impersonating Eisav. So great was his adherence to the mitzvah, that any infraction - even if it had his mother's encouragement - disturbed him. To offend his father, to impugn the mitzvah of Kibbud Av, caused his heart to melt like hot wax.

Eisav, on the other hand, the brother who was supposedly famous for his meticulous observance of the mitzvah of honoring his parents, became filled with rage when he heard his blessings. They did not live up to his expectations, so he cursed his father. "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, and I will slay my brother." This is the reaction of an Eisav, as opposed to a Yaakov. How fortunate are we to be the descendants of the latter. We must remember that this noble pedigree carries with it the demand that we follow in the path of our ancestor.

The children agitated within her...two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides shall be separated. (25:22,23)

Chazal explain that the root of "va'yisrotzetzu" is rotz, to run. When Rivkah passed the Yeshivah of Shem and Eivar, Yaakov "ran" and pushed to get out; and when she passed by a house of idol worship, Eisav "ran" and struggled to go forth. This Medrash seems to imply that Eisav was evil by nature from before his birth. "From your insides they shall be separated," prior to his entry into the world, Eisav was inclined toward evil. This perspective does not, however, coincide with Chazal's approach to the pasuk which describes Yaakov's and Eisav's entry into adulthood, "The lads grew up and Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents." (25:27) While he was young, Eisav's actions did not indicate any tendency towards evil. When they became bar-mitzvah, young adults, Eisav and Yaakov moved apart, each one gravitating to the place to which he apparently related best. Eisav went to evil. Yaakov sought wholesomeness.

There is a Yalkut that seems to disagree with this presentation of Eisav's origins. The Medrash

refers to the Avos, Patriarchs, as gedolim, great people/giants among men: "Vayigdelu ha'neirim," the lads grew up. "Until that moment, Eisav and Yaakov were equal! When Eisav changed his actions, when he denigrated the bechorah, birthright, he became a katan, small." How are we to reconcile these seemingly contradictory portrayals of Eisav? On the one hand, he was evil from before his birth. On the other hand, he was a gadol until age thirteen. Which description is accurate?

Horav Sholom Shwadron, zl, explains that essentially Eisav was a gadol, equal with Yaakov, as spiritually "superior" as the other Avos. He was however, a "rasha b'koach," wicked in potential. His evil was dormant, waiting for the opportunity to be aroused. No one noticed his iniquitous nature; it was concealed deep within his personality, waiting to be unleashed. What happened on that fateful day? What occurred when he became a bar mitzvah that prompted Eisav to manifest his true personality? Chazal teach us that during their formative years - until they became bar-mitzvah - they both went to the bais Medrash. Afterwards, they went their separate ways: Yaakov continued in the bais Medrash; and Eisav chose a new path, the road that led to idol worship and immorality. Rabbi Elazar says, "Until thirteen years, a father should be "metapel," attend to his son. From then onward, he should say, "Baruch shepetorani," "Blessed be the One that freed me from this punishment." This means that the father's responsibility ends at age thirteen. At that point, the halachah views the son as a man in his own right. Yitzchak Avinu was actively involved in Eisav's chinuch, educational process, until his bar-mitzvah. After that, he allowed Eisav to go in the path of his choice. Eisav jumped at the opportunity to obtain "freedom." He would have no more sheltered environment, no more classrooms, and no more restrictions on his comings and goings. Eisav could become the "man of the field" that lay dormant within him for so many years. He could now have a "life"!

It really is no wonder that someone who distinguished himself so for thirteen years should suddenly become a rasha merusha, evil incarnate. Eisav had it all within him. Eisav did not resort to his invidious behavior earlier on in life only because his father supervised him so closely. When Yitzchak cut the "apron strings," when he allowed Eisav his freedom, the real Eisav - that had lain dormant for thirteen years - was revealed. Eisav was smart; he did not go "off the derech", alienating himself from his father's beliefs right away. He waited two years, until he was fifteen, before he threw it all away. During these two years, Eisav put on a "good show." He was ashamed to publicly rebel against everything he had been taught. He made it appear as if he was still "mechunach," receiving a Torah education.

Yitzchak Avinu was acutely aware of Eisav's potential. He did everything within his capacity to educate his errant son, with the hope that it would tame him. It appeared to be working. He stopped at his bar-mitzvah, and then it all began to unravel. Eisav concealed his behavior at first, but slowly revealed that the "virtuous" Eisav who had been so good in the yeshivah was no longer the dominant image. The chinuch process helped to suppress Eisav's natural inclinations - it did not cure him. In order for the educational process to succeed, the student has to accept it upon himself. Eisav obviously did not.

The children agitated within her, and she said, "If so, why am I thus?" (25:22)

"If this is what I will be subjected to, why do I want to be pregnant and have a child?" Certainly, Rivkah did not want a difficult pregnancy to dissuade her from the joys of motherhood. Chazal explain that she was concerned about the spiritual health of the child she was carrying. She sought to bring a child into the world that would contribute to the world; who would continue the Patriarchal chain. She

was not interested in giving birth to a child who ran both to the bais medrash and to the house of idol worship.

Paying lip service to Judaism, while maintaining a relationship with idols and their priests, indicates a spiritual ambivalence for which there is no constructive response. One can be cured only if he realizes that he is sick.

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, takes an interesting approach to interpreting Rivkah's words. Parental insecurity and inconsistency influence the children's development. Quite often, when we are told something is wrong with one of our children, we immediately look to blame someone else. Is it the school, the teacher, his friends? Do we ever stop to think that maybe we are the problem? Perhaps we are setting a double standard, living a dual life - at home and at work. Are we consistent our mitzvah observance? Do we demand that our children study Torah diligently, while we maintain a lifestyle that is far from Torah-oriented? Do we expect them to be observant and moral, while we privately are neither?

Upon sensing that something might be spiritually deficient in her child, Rivkah immediately questioned, "Is it me?" Is it the anochi - the "I" - that is the cause of my child's shortcomings? She knew her roots; she was well aware of her lineage. Was a strain of her background affecting her offspring? Rivkah teaches us the first question that parents must ask themselves when they are confronted with a problem in one of their children: Is it me?

Eisav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents. (25:27)

The Torah presents us with two characterizations of Eisav: a hunter and a man of the field. How do these "vocations" determine that an individual is evil? Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, explains that for the Torah Jew, life is full, life is replete with Torah, mitzvos and acts of loving-kindness. The Torah Jew is never bored, never looking for something to fill the void in his life, because he has no void - he has the Torah. In some moments in one's life things just do not seem to go right. People look for past-times, for companionship, for trips, all for one purpose - to fill a void in their lives. A Torah Jew has the Torah to preoccupy his life, giving him purpose, hope and vibrancy. David Hamelech says in Tehillim (119:92), "Had Your Torah not been my preoccupation, then I would have perished in my affliction." We go through times which can be described as an "anyii," affliction. During these periods, the Torah is our solace, our source of courage and hope. One's love for Hashem and His Torah immediately fill the void left by these moments of "affliction."

Eisav was not such a person. He filled his void with pastimes. He was into sports, loved hunting, preoccupied with his time in the "field." While Eisav may have entertained the idea of going to the bais medrash to study a bit, he retained one foot in the field. He was an "ish sadeh," a man of the field. His relationship with Torah was, at best, cursory. His life was the field. He did not appreciate the incredible benefits one accrues as a Torah Jew. The satisfaction and reassurance, the joy and excitement one experiences through Torah study, is something to which Eisav could not relate. Regrettably, Eisav has followers even in contemporary times. If they would realize whose way of life they were

emulating, they might reconsider.

The voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav. (27:22)

The commentators ponder various interpretations for Yitzchak's response when Yaakov came to him dressed as Eisav. Chazal say that we derive from this pasuk that Yaakov's focus in life was the work of the spirit, delving into Torah study and devoting himself to mitzvah observance. Eisav lived by the sword. He was a fighter, whose bloodthirsty nature was represented by the hands. As long as Yaakov's "voice" rang loud and clear in the shuls and yeshivos, then Eisav's "hands" could have no dominion over him. The sefer Maalos HaTorah questions this interpretation, since the text seems to imply that the hands of Eisav functioned simultaneously with the voice of Yaakov. In other words, when the voice of Yaakov was thriving, the hands of Eisav ruled. What prompts Chazal to interpret the pasuk exactly the opposite of its text? He responds that Chazal saw in Yitzchak's words a two-fold blessing for Yaakov. When Yaakov's voice in the Bais hamedrash will be strong, then his hands will be as strong as Eisav's. He will have nothing to fear from his enemies. It is only when his voice wanes, when his Torah learning becomes complacent and weak, that he fears Eisav.

"V'hi sheomdah la'avoseinu" – "It is this that has stood by our forefathers." Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, explains that the "this" is a reference to kol Yaakov. The voice of Yaakov represents the power of Torah learning that has been a resource for us against our enemies. He cites a number of instances in Navi and Chazal that clearly indicate how our success has always been attributed to the koach ha'Torah, power of Torah.

The Navi Yehoshua (5:13) relates how when Yehoshua was in Yericho, he was confronted by what appeared to be a powerful man standing before him with his sword drawn. Yehoshua asked him if he was friend or foe. He responded that he was an angel sent by Hashem to admonish Yehoshua for the bitul Torah, neglecting of Torah study, that had occurred. That night Yehoshua studied diligently, delving into the profundities of Torah. The Alter M'kelm questions the critique against Klal Yisrael. These people were engaged in a war, a milchemes mitzvah, a war that Hashem had commanded them to fight. This was not discretionary; it was mandatory. In regard to this question, Rashi has already asserted that since they did not battle at night, the evenings should have been reserved for Torah study. Is it that simple to sit down by the Gemorah at night after a whole day of battle? Are they to be chastised for this type of neglect? Moreover, they evidently did study Torah. It just was not, however, b'amkus, with a profound focus; it was cursory - but Torah study nonetheless.

Horav Solomon cites Horav Elya Lopian, zl, who asks a profound question: If the angel came to them to protest their bitul Torah, why did he appear "dressed" as an officer with his sword drawn? Should not his appearance reflect his message? He should have appeared as a rosh yeshivah admonishing the people for not learning enough. The answer says, Rav Elya, is that the angel was telling Yehoshua just that: "I am the angel who is to guide you to ensure that you triumph in battle. I cannot succeed if you neglect the Torah. Your key to success in war is your spiritual - not physical prowess!" At the onset of Klal Yisrael's first battle for land they were told the rules: In order to succeed, there has to be "Kol Yaakov." If the voice of Yaakov is sounded with exuberance and enthusiasm in the batei medrash and batei knesses, then we have dominance over our enemies. If not, if kol Yaakov is weak, then we have nothing - neither "hands" nor voice.

And Eisav spurned the birthright. (25:34)

Eisav had no interest in the spiritual calling that was inherent in the birthright. Indeed, the Torah records that he held it in contempt. The Torah uses the word "vayivez" to describe Eisav's attitude towards the bechorah; it was literally a "bizayon," humiliating/degrading experience for him to connect with the birthright. The Baal HaTurim cites another place where the word "vayivez" is used: "Vayivez b'einav," "It seemed contemptible to him [to send his] hand against Mordechai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordechai" (Megillas Esther 3:6). Haman ha'rasha, the great-grandson of Eisav, also displayed "vayivez," contempt, for Mordechai and his people. Horav Chaim Elazary, zl, sees a distinct corollary between the two instances of "vayivez" and the two people involved. If a father exhibits scorn for the avodah, service, which was basically Eisav's attitude, then his grandson - or in some situations even his son - will disparage those that perform this spiritual service! Eisav degraded the bechorah; Haman was prepared to destroy the Jewish people, to whom the service performed in the Mikdash was inviolate.

What a profound lesson for us! We have only to peruse Jewish history to see this idea repeated time and time again. Regrettably, we do not have to go so far as Eisav's descendants to see the contempt and abuse to which the ben Torah has been subjected. To think that it all began with a desire to append the ritual. This led to an all-out rejection of all forms of observance and disdain for its adherents.

Chezkuni continues along the same lines when he asserts that Eisav spurned the birthright, so that people would not think he was a fool for rejecting something of value. In other words, Eisav wanted out; he sought to free himself of the restrictions of Torah and mitzvos. He facilitated his desire for freedom by disparaging the ritual, in an attempt to conceal his real motives. Once again, history repeats itself. The new theological and philosophical chidushim, innovations, are nothing more than illegitimate excuses for granting the adherents license to live a lifestyle "unencumbered" by the Torah. For some, the Torah is viewed as an impediment to an unrestrained, libertine lifestyle. To us, it is the only way to live.

And these are the offspring of Yitzchak, son of Avraham, Avraham begot Yitzchak. (25:19)

This pasuk seems redundant. Obviously, if Yitzchak is Avraham's son, Avraham must have begotten Yitzchak. The commentators respond with various explanations. Ibn Ezra interprets "Avraham begot Yitzchak" as a reference to the fact that Avraham raised and educated Yitzchak. Educating a child is equivalent to begetting that child, since one "creates" a human being through the process of education. Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, suggests that by using this apparent redundancy the Torah addresses a question that plagues students of the historical narrative of the Patriarchs. How would two brothers, Yaakov and Eisav, who were raised by the same parents, who received an equivalent education, have developed natures so disparate from one another?

Horav Alpert explains that two factors contribute to determining a child's educational development: his nature and personality, as inherited from his parents; the education he receives from his parents and mentors. These actually represent two forms of birth. A child may be born to wonderful, caring, loving parents who will do anything to provide him with the finest education. If the child reneges and refuses to learn, however, the entire process is futile. This is the reason for the Torah's redundancy. "These are the offspring of Yitzchak the son of Avraham." Yitzchak inherits his unique

nature from his revered father, Avraham. The virtues required for Yitzchok to become the next Patriarch were in place. "Avraham begot Yitzchak" - Avraham succeeded in nurturing Yitzchak's unique talents and attributes in response to Yitzchak's desire to emulate his father's lifestyle and spiritual perspective. Yitzchak had a burning desire to study with, and be educated by, his father.

We understand how it is possible for Yitzchak to beget twin boys, one who adheres to his way of life and the other who rejects it totally. They were born with similar abilities inherited from the same parents. Yaakov sought to emulate his parents. Eisav, regrettably, was determined to reject the opportunity to learn from paradigmatic role models.

Yitzchak loved Eisav for game was in his mouth. (25:28)

Eisav used guile to fool Yitzchak. He was "tzayid b'fiv", a hunter with his mouth. He ensnared his father with halachic questions. He portrayed himself as a devout scholar, concerned about the intricacies of giving Maaser, tithing crops. "How does one tithe salt? How does one tithe straw?" he asked Yitzchak, knowing fully well that Maaser does not apply to these two substances.

Chazal interpret the words "tzayid b'fiv", to be descriptions of Eisav's cunning. He used his mouth for subterfuge. Should one assume that Yitzchak yearned for Eisav's "hunt"? Surely, he had sufficient sheep and cattle that he did not have to send Eisav to look for outside sources of food. When it was time for the brachos, blessings, Yaakov was able to prepare a fine feast from the available sheep. Yet, the pasuk seems to imply that Yitachak enjoyed the tzayid, hunt, which Eisav had brought to him. Moreover, Yitzchak requested Eisav to bring him a "tzayid" that was prepared according to his liking before he would bless him. Something about this "tzayid" eludes us.

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, renders the narrative of Yaakov and Eisav homiletically, in order to teach us a timely lesson. The dispute between Yaakov and Eisav was of a spiritual nature, namely, how to reach out to those who were distant from Hashem. Yaakov's derech, approach, to serving Hashem was such that his influence was limited to those in his immediate environment. Eisav considered Yaakov's ability to influence others to be focused only on the "sheep and cattle," an analogy for those who were in his immediate "domestic" surroundings. Eisav, on the other hand, sought to reach out to "wild beasts and fowl," those who were extremely distant from his father's teachings. Eisav questioned the halachah regarding tithing straw; once again, this is an analogy for the external shell that flies away. Yaakov concerned himself with the kernel which remained in his immediate presence. Eisav went out into the "world" to seek those who were outside of Yaakov's spiritual periphery. He employed various methods for outreach, methods that were as unconventional as the people he sought to inspire. In contrast to Yaakov, Eisav was a firm believer in the idea that the end justifies the means. Regrettably, the "end" did not always turn out the way Eisav had planned. Eisav was left with his questionable "means," which all too often left their imprimatur on him.

Yitzchak was not aware of Eisav's "success" ratio. He was, indeed, impressed with his visionary approach to reaching out to the alienated. This was Yitzchak's goal in life. Consequently, he encouraged Eisav, taking deep pride in his son's exploits. Although he was truly proud of Yaakov's "sitting and learning" in his tent of Torah, his daring to reach out to others paled in comparison to Eisav's description of his own plan for success. Yitzchak desired Eisav's tzayid, his hunt, the person that he would bring in from afar.

Rivkah knew that Eisav's tzayid was all in his mouth; he was a tzayid b'fiv. Instead of

captivating others, he himself became ensnared. The methods he used for outreach turned him into a monster. She loved Yaakov's tzayid, his hunt, which was solid, firmly rooted and spiritually balanced. On the other hand, she did not value the unstable, strange people who Eisav indiscriminately collected, who were unlikely to remain for the duration of the experience.

We now understand why Eisav sought the blessings and why Yitzchak desired to give them to him. He saw in Eisav's work a daring which contrasted with Yaakov's solid accomplishments. He saw Eisav reaching out to a world. He overestimated Eisav, not realizing that Eisav had become an unfortunate sacrifice of his own work. He had rejected his father's faith and was living a life of sham and shame.

Why did Eisav denigrate the "bechorah", right of the first born, and then become furious when Yaakov received the berachos in his place? Chazal tell us that Yaakov feared Eisav's merit for all the years that he had served his father, fulfilling the mitzvah of Kibbud Av V'eim, honoring one's parents, while Yaakov was away at the yeshivah of Shem and Eivar. Eisav also had the advantage of living in Eretz Yisrael the entire time that Yaakov was away. Using the same approach, Horav Sorotzkin explains that Yaakov feared Eisav's social mitzvos and his devotion to Eretz Yisrael. Why did he need the bechorah? He was a warrior, fighting for the land, concerning himself with social action and love for his fellow man. The bechorah was intended for one who would sit in his corner studying Torah. Eisav had more "important" things to do. Yet, if the bechorah could help him to succeed in his quest to reach out to others, then he also wanted the bechorah.

When Yitzchak commanded Yaakov not to take a Canaanite wife, Eisav also followed his father's orders and married Yishmael's daughter. He, however, did not divorce his previous pagan wives. He wanted to live in both worlds, perform a few social mitzvos, fight for the land and continue to maintain his pagan lifestyle. This approach resulted in the birth of a grandson named Amalek, the archenemy of the Jewish People, as well as the development of Eisav's hatred for the land that he supposedly loved and a hatred for his father.

Eisav represents the paradigm of the confused Jew who wants to save the world, regardless of the means that he must employ. In the end, he is at odds with his own brethren, whose lifestyle he has denigrated in the name of Am Yisrael. How sad it is that history repeats itself so often. If we would only open our eyes, we might see its message.

And Eisav was forty years old and he took a wife...and they were a source of bitterness for Yitzchak and Rivkah. (26:35)

Rivkah Imeinu is compared to a rose among thorns. She remained righteous despite the thorn of evil which surrounded her: her father, her brother; indeed, her entire environment was replete with evil. She rose above her environment, above the negative influences that permeated her background. Chazal describe her exemplary virtue. When Yitzchak married Rivkah and brought her home to his mother's tent, the three blessings which had been present during Sarah's lifetime returned: a lamp burning from one Shabbos eve to the next; her dough was blessed; a cloud signifying the Divine Presence hung over her tent. All of these had ceased with Sarah's death.

When Rivkah married Yitzchak she was three years old. Certainly, whatever evil she had been exposed to would have been eradicated by the time she stood with Yitzchak praying for guidance. They were married for twenty years before Rivkah gave birth to Yaakov and Eisav. She had experienced

forty more years of living in an environment of total kedushah and taharah, holiness and purity, married to the olah temimah, perfect elevation offering, Yitzchak Avinu, when Yaakov and Eisav received the blessings from their father.

Yet, when addressing Yitzchak and Rivkah's displeasure with Eisav's pagan wives, the Torah mentions Yitzchak's name first. This leads Chazal to comment that, indeed, Yitzchak was provoked first and Rivkah only later. Having grown up in an element that was suffused with idolatry, Rivkah was not as acutely outraged as her husband, who had grown up in Avraham Avinu's home.

What are Chazal telling us with this statement? Hegyonei Mussar infers a profound lesson from here. Rivkah Imeinu, despite her aversion to idol-worship, was not as disturbed by its presence in her son's home as was Yitzchak. The difference between the two was their relative level of exposure. Rivkah was exposed to pagan worship, an evil for which she never lost complete repugnance, even sixty years later! Once we are exposed to evil we lose our contempt for it.

It is not necessary to delineate the apparent lesson this has for us today. We and our children come in contact with the revulsion that has become the symbol of contemporary society through various medias. While we think they have no effect on us, the Torah seems to disagree. Are we willing to take the chance and risk our children's spiritual development?

And Eisav saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Yitzchak, his father...He took Machlas, the daughter of Yishmael...in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself. (28:8,9)

Thus ends part one of the narrative about Yaakov and Eisav. Many commentators have devoted much to telling about their relationship. Their apparent discord climaxed when Yaakov received the berachos in Eisav's place. This incident provoked Eisav's anger, and hatred toward Yaakov, to the point that Eisav took it upon himself to kill Yaakov. While Yaakov fled Eisav's fury, Eisav decided to take another wife for himself. Does the Torah present this in accurate chronological sequence or simply as an historical vignette about Eisav? The Shem Mishmuel opines that Eisav's decision to marry another wife was a critical component in the sequence of events. Indeed, this action defines his true character. He thought that by changing his wife, his fortune would improve!

When one perceives that he has been punished, he should examine his actions. What could he have done wrong that would warrant this extreme response from Hashem? How could he have improved his behavior? One should pursue self-improvement after he notices that his life is not proceeding as it should.

This course of action was above Eisav's comprehension. When something went wrong, he immediately found fault in someone else. He projected the blame on everyone but himself. He was so evil that he could not imagine that he was responsible for his own misfortune. His pagan wives must have been the cause. He viewed the problem to be external, never involving himself. First the Torah recounts all that transpired between Yaakov and Eisav, highlighting Eisav's blatant display of evil. The Torah proceeds to summarize the story by detailing the character flaw that was the source of Eisav's downfall: his inability to acknowledge his own faults. This flaw, says the Shem Mishmuel, is inherent in Eisav's name. The name Eisav has the same Hebrew letters as the word "asu", which means made/completed. Eisav viewed himself as complete, lacking nothing, having no need for self-improvement. The numerical equivalent of Eisav is 376, the same as the word "shalom," peace, wholeness. Eisav was at total peace with himself. He saw nothing wrong with what he was doing. He

always blamed someone else. This Eisavian character is the work of the yetzer hora, evil inclination, that always finds ways to fool us into believing that we can do no wrong. How often do we seek to justify our iniquitous actions? How often do we refuse to accept responsibility for the wrongs that we have perpetrated? We simply divorce ourselves from our deeds and continue blaming everybody but ourselves.

Interestingly, Eisav did not rid himself of his previous wives. He simply added another one to this clan. Despite their insidious idol worship and his father's apparent disdain for them, he could find no fault in them other than their Canaanite heritage. Consequently, he took a new wife of Abrahamic descent for child-bearing purposes, while continuing to retain his original pagans. Eisav's myopia clouded his vision of right and wrong.

Yaakov's name defines his character. The name Yaakov is derived from akeiv, heel. The Patriarch viewed himself as lowly, always in need of greater achievement, never satisfied with his present accomplishment. He sought to climb to greater heights in his quest for closeness to Hashem.

The disparity between Yaakov and Eisav should serve as a lesson for us all. Eisav's ruin resulted from his refusal to examine his own mistakes. He always blamed someone, or something, else for whatever wrong for which he should have found the source within himself. Yaakov, who serves as the standard from which we should all learn, teaches us the ability to scrutinize our own behavior and to be on a constant vigil. Demanding self-improvement is the key to success as a ben Torah, as well as our survival as the Jewish nation.

And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivkah, daughter of Besuel the Arami from Paddan Aram, sister of Lavan the Arami (25:20)

Rashi remarks that although Rivkah's background was well-known, the Torah repeats it to reinforce its praise of her. She was the daughter of a wicked man and the sister of a wicked man; she was raised in an environment that was wicked. Yet, she was able to maintain herself on a high level of virtue, remaining uninfluenced by her environment. We may question this statement. Is there nothing else about Rivkah that evokes praise for her? In Parashas Chayei Sarah, the Torah lauds her remarkable sensitivity and her commitment to performing acts of loving-kindness. The Torah teaches us that the spiritual emptiness which pervaded the house due to the death of his mother, Sarah Imeinu, dissipated when Yitzchak married Rivkah. Are we still to assert that Rivkah's only unique trait was her ability to resist environmental influences?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, suggests that Rashi is relating in which area Rivkah's remarkable virtues manifested themselves. In other words, her ability to resist the environmental influences is indicative of her unique personality, which catalyzed her acts of chesed. Rivkah is distinguished by her ability to overcome the challenge of her surroundings. It is not her virtue--it is her unique personality. This is why Rivkah towers above others.

What is so unique about resisting the effect of one's environment? Horav Epstein explains that human nature compels the individual to make every effort to be like his peers. This is a result of the middah of kinah, the character trait of jealousy. We dress like those in our surrounding environment; we act like them; we are influenced by their ideals and values. We respond in this manner because we have an innate tendency to be envious. Hashem created us with the attribute of kinah, so that we should strive to emulate the positive achievements of our peers. "Kinaas sofrim tarbeh chachmah," jealousy

among scribes increases wisdom. One should seek to become a scholar or a G-d-fearing Jew like his friend. Thus, we can utilize this middah to attain a positive effect. In contrast, the yetzer hora, evil inclination, incites us to employ the character trait of jealousy in a negative manner.

Does man have a guarantee that if he succeeds in attaining a high level of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, he will not slip back to a lower level? No! The virtue and righteousness we achieve are not inherent. They do not belong to us. Yitzchak Avinu was blind and relegated to a sequestered lifestyle at home. There was hope for him. Chazal tell us that Yochanan Kohen Gadol reigned for eighty years as the epitome of holiness before reverting to become an apostate. Is there any guarantee? No! The outside influence can permeate our psyche to the point that we no longer are in control.

A person about whom we can emphatically assert that he is not inspired by external influences, who is above the pressures and prompting of his environment, is truly a virtuous person. Indeed, Rivkah had many remarkable qualities, among them her sensitivity towards others. What guaranteed the lasting power of these wonderful attributes? What ensured that these qualities would endure? What proof do we have that they were integral qualities? Her ability to resist and transcend her environment was her most laudatory virtue. Without that, her wonderful qualities were precariously vulnerable to the harsh environment in which she lived.

Perhaps my father will feel me and I shall be as a mocker in his eyes; I will thus bring upon myself a curse rather than a blessing. (27:12)

Yaakov feared that his deception would be discovered. If so, rather than receive blessing, he would have been cursed. We may question Yaakov's concern. In the final analysis, he did serve his father. Yitzchak noted that the "voice" was not consistent with the "hands"; yet, he blessed Yaakov. What prompted Yaakov to fear a curse? Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, renders a thoughtful explanation. When Yitzchak discovered that there was "something" inconsistent about the person who stood before him, he felt it could be attributed to one of two factors. Yaakov could have been dressed as Eisav, which would give reason for concern, but something that could be interpreted positively. There will be periods during Klal Yisrael's exile when "Yaakov" must resort to the "Eisav" medium in dealing with his enemies. While it is not something to which we aspire, at times we must deal with the wicked in a "language" to which they are acutely attuned. As long as we remain "Yaakov" in our own conviction, however, there is still a place for blessing.

Another alternative confronted Yitzchak, one that was truly devastating. Perhaps this was Eisav speaking like Yaakov! Eisav could be reverting to "acting" like Yaakov. If we peruse Jewish history, or, in fact, look around contemporary times, we will note the devastation that has been wrought by those who speak like "Yaakov," but whose goals represent Eisav's way of life.

When Yitzchak heard Yaakov mention Hashem's Name, he knew who really stood before him. Eisav never used the Name of the Almighty. Yitzchak saw that while Yaakov was compelled to resort to guile and to present himself in a false manner, he did not deviate from his conviction in Hashem. There was yet hope for blessing. Yaakov would not compromise on his observance, even if it meant relinquishing the blessings. Eisav, on the other hand, was completely satisfied to renounce the birthright for a bowl of red lentil soup.

Rivkah took her older son Eisav's clean garments and clothed Yaakov her young son. (27:15)

Rashi explains that these garments were actually Eisav's precious garments, which he had stolen from the great King Nimrod. Eisav, who was meticulous in the honor he bestowed on his father, always served Yitzchak while wearing these precious garments. Obviously Eisav's attitude towards Kibbud Av, honoring his father; did not transform him into a moral human being. He continued in his evil ways, despite his meticulous performance of a single mitzvah. How are we to understand the paradox that was Eisav? How can someone who dons precious clothes to serve his father "moonlight" as a murderer?

The commentators respond in various ways to this anomaly. The Yehudi m'Pechischa suggests an insightful explanation which teaches a timeless lesson. A young man of questionable character once came to visit the Rebbe. He was concerned that the tzaddik would accurately perceive him, so he "prepared" himself prior to his visit. He went to the mikveh, made specific religious preparations and dressed himself in "frum" clothes, garments that would present him as G-d-fearing. He let his payos, earlocks, grow and made cosmetic changes that would give him the appearance of an observant Jew.

The Yehudi, sensing that something was not kosher, asked the Jew to explain how Eisav was able to remain Eisav given that he had served his father so meticulously. He must have been with Yitzchak often; how could he have continued along his sinful way? The Yehudi looked at the Jew and offered a response. He explained that Yaakov attended his father wearing his usual weekday garments. This means that Yaakov did not alter his appearance; Yitzchak saw the real Yaakov--without embellishment. He came as he was---with his good and "bad" characteristics. Yitzchak was able to notice Yaakov's faults and reprove him. Yaakov accepted his father's guidance and corrected his deficiencies. Eisav, however, made a point of wearing only his best clothes. He disguised all of his faults. His life was a sham, so why not continue his disguise when he presented himself before his father? Yitzchak was privy to see only Eisav's good side. He could not suggest to Eisav that he correct any flaws, because they were hidden from him. Consequently, Eisav remained evil.

The man who stood before the Yehudi understood the Rebbe's message and left a different person. We must remember that when we present ourselves falsely, the only one we hurt is ourself.

And Eisav raised up his voice and wept. (27:37)

Eisav's tears have had a significant impact on the fate of Klal Yisrael. We have been considered unscrupulous for stealing Eisav's birthright. Eisav was rewarded for his tears. He experienced peace and tranquillity as a result of his weeping. Moreover, the Zohar Hakadosh says that Moshiach will not come until Eisav's tears will dry. This is the analogy: We will remain under Eisav's power until we repent and shed tears that will overwhelm Eisav's tears. What do Chazal mean by this? Ostensibly, Klal Yisrael has long ago surpassed the level of Eisav's tears. What aspect of his tears condemned us so?

Eisav was sincere when he cried. He wept for the blessings that he had lost. He wept for something positive that now eluded him. What do we cry about? Do we cry because we cannot perform mitzvos properly? Do we cry because we cannot understand the Gemara? Eisav wept for blessings. We weep for the pain and suffering which have accompanied us throughout history. We may learn how and what to cry for--from Eisav. When we demonstrate that same sense of loss over mitzvos and berachos as Eisav

did, then our tears will overwhelm his. It is not the quantity of our tears, but their catalyst that is important.

And Yaakov listened to his father and to his mother. (28:7)

Yaakov followed his parents' instructions not to take a wife from the girls of Canaan. The Midrash refers to Yaakov as a chacham, wise man, because he listened to his parents' advice. They cite a pasuk in Mishlei 12:14, "One who listens to advice is a chacham." Let us analyze Yaakov's remarkable wisdom. Eisav is waiting to kill him. His parents told him that his "bashert," future wife, was waiting for him in Charan. He did not have many options. He had the choice to stay and be killed or to leave and meet his destined wife.

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, observes that specifically herein lies Yaakov's astuteness. While logic dictated that he should leave, he left only because he heeded to his parents. He ignored every other reason for going. He responded only to his parents' directive that he leave. His chachmah was his ability to listen.

Perhaps he should have stayed and confronted Eisav. After all, he was very strong. We see that he was able to lift a giant boulder that rested upon a well, a feat that would have taken an entire group of shepherds to perform. Maybe he should have rid himself of Eisav, once and for all. Yaakov realized, however, that a wise man realistically has only one approach to consider. He listens to advice from someone more astute and more experienced than he.

Many individuals experience difficulty listening to someone, taking advice from an elder or especially a peer. The alternative is to do things according to one's own line of thinking. Shlomo Ha'melech tells us that he who listens is a wise man. By implication, he who does not listen is a fool. The litmus test of an individual's objectivity is his willingness to heed advice.

Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita, takes a similar approach to explain an apparent inconsistency in the Torah's attitude towards punishment. We find that when Avraham sent Hagar, Sarah's maidservant, away with Yishmael, Hashem responded to the child's cry. According to the Midrash, the angels pleaded with Hashem not to perform a miracle to save Yishmael. They argued that because his descendants would persecute and murder Jews, he did not deserve to live. Hashem said that he would respond to Yishmael "ba'asher hu shom," according to his present deeds and not according to what would happen in the future. The question that plagues us is why is Yishmael different from the ben sorer u'moreh, the wayward and rebellious son, who is put to death in response to his inevitable future behavior. "Let him die while he is innocent, and let him not die when he is guilty (of capital crime)." What distinguishes the ben sorer u'moreh that we do not look at him "according to his present state"? Horav Solomon suggests that the answer lies in the Torah's characterization of the rebellious son, "(He) does not listen to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother." One who refuses to listen has demonstrated that his future will follow the course that he has charted for himself. He will not change. For one who refuses to listen there is no hope. Yishmael, on the other hand, repented later on in life. If one listens, there is hope; if one shuts his ears, he closes off his possible options.

Horav Ezrachi cites Rabbeinu Yona in Shaarei Teshuvah 2:12, who cites a remarkable Midrash. Chazal say, "If a person falls from a roof and breaks his bones and hurts and bruises himself; he will need a dressing for every individual organ that was hurt. If a person sins with all his organs, blemishing them spiritually, he only needs one dressing--for his ear." If a person is willing to listen, then regardless

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of previous spiritual damage, he can be healed. If his ear is not functioning, then no dressing will attain much healing power.