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The Power of Communication

By: Ariella Goloborodsky

B"H

In Parshat Toldot, we see Rivka portrayed as a strong and independent woman who carries out a scheme to deceive her husband, Yitzchak, and her elder son, Eisav, in the name of Hashem. In her scheme, Rivka encourages Yaakov to lie to his father in order to claim the blessing that G-d had earlier given to Abraham and then Yitzchak, promising them an abundance of children and the land of Israel. *What was Rivka's motivation in planning this scheme at the risk of causing strife between her children and her husband? If she felt it was necessary to switch the blessings, then why wouldn't she just discuss it with Yitzchak?*

Rashi explains that the children struggled in Rivka's womb more than during a regular pregnancy. He refers to the Rabbis who explain that whenever Rivka passed by a house of Torah study, Yaakov would kick excessively, trying to exit the womb. Eisav on the other hand would do so when Rivka would pass by a house of idol-worship. After reading this commentary, we see that even from pregnancy, Rivka knew that one of her sons would grow up to be attracted to idol-worship and the other to Judaism. As Eisav and Yaakov grew up, Rivka was able to sense that Yaakov was attracted to Torah study and Jewish values, and Eisav was attracted to idol worship and worldly values. This may have been one of the reasons that Rivka saw it fit to assess which son was worthy of the "blessing of Avraham."

Although Rashi helps us understand why Rivka felt that she was a better fit to decide which blessing would go to which son, the question of how she knew G-d wanted her to intervene still remains. The Or Hachaim comments on the words "V'Rivka Shoma'at" (Bereishit 27:5) explaining that the Torah is telling us that Rivka was a prophetess, and was always able to hear Yitzchak, even when she wasn't around him. Therefore, when Yitzchak was quietly instructing Eisav to prepare a meal for him, Rivka, standing far away, was able to hear them. From this, we can understand that Rivka knew Hashem wanted her to intervene because He allowed her to hear their conversation.

Onkelos also speaks about Rivka as a prophetess. Rivka seems so confident in her scheme that when Yaakov expresses his fears of being cursed if he lies to his father and steals the blessing, she tells him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me" (Bereshit 27:13). Onkelos comments on these words explaining where Rivka's confidence stems from. Onkelos explains that during Rivka's pregnancy she received a prophecy from G-d that "the older son will serve the younger" (Bereshit 25:23). This prophecy must have given her the confidence to go through with this scheme, knowing that G-d intended Yaakov to receive this blessing all along.

Although these commentators provide compelling explanations, the question of why Rivka could not simply voice her concerns to Yitzchak about Eisav receiving the blessing still stands. In his book, "Lessons in Leadership," Rabbi Lord

Jonathan Sacks zt"l writes about "the price of silence" referring to Rivka's relationship with Yitzchak. Rabbi Sacks quotes the Netziv who says that "Rivka's relationship with Yitzchak was not the same as that of Sarah and Abraham, or Rachel and Yaakov" (Haamak Davar to Bereshit 24:65). He explains that from the beginning of their relationship when Rivka saw Yitzchak "meditating in the field," (Bereishit 24:63) she covered herself with a veil because a feeling of awe came over her, and she felt unworthy to be his wife. He continues to explain that the relationship between Rivka and Yitzchak was not "casual, candid, and communicative". As a result, Rivka may have never told Yitzchak about the prophecy she received during pregnancy, where G-d told her that "the elder will serve the younger" (Bereishit 25:23). Rabbi Sacks suggests that many years later, when she hears that Yitzchak is about to bless Eisav, she plans this scheme for Yaakov to get the blessing because she is reluctant to admit to Yitzchak that she had kept this prophecy from him through all these years.

Rabbi Sacks points out a fundamental lesson about the importance of communication in relationships. He explains that if Rivka would have just spoken to Yitzchak about her concerns, he would have told her that he never intended to give Eisav the "Blessing of Avraham" in the first place. Yitzchak had always planned on giving Eisav the blessing of wealth and power, and Yaakov the blessing of the children and Israel. The lack of open communication between Rivka and Yitzchak led to many consequences, beginning from Yitzchak feeling betrayed by Yaakov, to Eisav forming such an intense hatred for Yaakov that resulted in Yaakov having to run away.

Clear, honest, open, and strong communication is a vital component in all the relationships of our lives. This type of communication helps us maintain healthy relationships and refrain from consequential problems, like the one that Yitzchak and Rivka encountered. Rabbi Sacks explains how just like G-d created the world with words, we create our relationships with words. At times it is not easy to start a conversation or maintain open communication channels, and yet if we recognize the importance of doing so, and the consequences we may face when we don't, we will keep pushing ourselves to communicate openly even in the most challenging situations.

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## Two Facets to Judaism

By: Max Halaas

In parashat Toldot we are introduced to Yitzchak's sons, Eisav and Yaakov. Before they are born we are told that Rivka identified two different types of people in her womb. We learn from a Midrash that Yaakov would kick the womb when Rivka passed by a place of Torah study and Eisav would kick when Rivka passed a place of idol worship. *How is it possible that Eisav and Yaakov had free will if they were already good and bad in the womb?*

The whole Torah depends on the idea that there is free will. If there was no free will, then we could not be rewarded for our *mitzvot* or punished for our sins, since we didn't have any other choice. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the natural inclination towards idolatry is just an obstacle that you have to overcome in order to become a good person. Using this explanation, we can see that Eisav wasn't predetermined to be bad, he was merely given an obstacle in his life.

Another reason is that Yaakov and Eisav show two different sides to Judaism, as the Ramban explains. Some people believe that this doesn't mean good versus evil, but instead means two different ways of gratification. One being living your life following G-d and doing good deeds, and the other is the conquest of evil and the hunt to destroy it. The first one is the one that Yitzhak pursues and the second one is the one Eisav could have achieved if he didn't let his evil inclination overcome him. In short, Hashem doesn't create good or bad people, but rather, he creates different obstacles for each person to overcome in order to become a better person. That is the meaning of the Proverb: *The better the person the stronger the evil inclination* (Sukkah 52a). With this being taken into account, it can be said that Eisav had the potential to become a greater person than Yaakov, but Eisav failed in his challenges.

This teaches us that when we see a person in pain or a person going through something -- that on the surface seems bad -- just think that this might be the start of a great enlightening journey for them. Instead of looking down at them, do what you can to help and at the very least don't be mean to them. Another important lesson we can learn from is that people who are on a lower level than others aren't any worse. Hashem just gave them different challenges. If they overcome their obstacles they will come out as incredible people.

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What's in a Name  
By: Sophia Ohayon

**P**arashat Toldot focuses on the story of Yaakov and Eisav's complex, dysfunctional relationship. Eisav was born before Yaakov, who was described as grasping Eisav's heel. While analyzing the plot and characters of Parashat Toldot, a compelling question may cross our minds. *Why was Yaakov named יעקב with an added yud and not just עקב, heel? What does this yud represent?*

The Darashos HaRan taught that the crucial moment of when Yaakov was holding Eisav's heel foreshadows the brothers' future relationship, in which Yaakov would be the holy, spiritual, and powerful brother (Darashos HaRan 2:25). The Darashos HaRan describes the moment as a deep and spiritually meaningful action. This leads us to understand that this action of Yaakov holding Eisav corresponds to the reason he was named Yaakov. Yaakov held onto the *yud* in his name. There are various times in the Torah where *yud* symbolizes righteousness; *yud* is the first letter of G-d's four-letter name. Yaakov fights to be number one; Eisav simply receives the *vuv* in his name, lacking the same level of Godliness. That is the first key example of how different the brothers will be. Because of Yaakov's passion for G-d since day one, he fights for and receives the first letter in Hashem's name, meaning he is G-d's number one. The *yud* in Yaakov's name represents his dedication to Hashem since his birth.

Rashi describes that God names him Yaakov (Rashi 25:26). The *yud* is the first letter in G-d's name and is given to Yaakov because Hashem claims him as the blessed brother and recognizes his future dedication to Him.

The Torah never includes anything without a significant lesson. From this story and the explanation of the *mefarshim*, we learn that your name is your essence. Not only must you be proud of your name but you must live up to its meaning. Hashem has everyone named according to their essence. It is their responsibility to work hard to achieve what it means. Yaakov had this letter of Hashem that he forever worked hard to live up to. Yaakov is an example for us that we should all be working hard to actualize the meaning behind our names.

Two  
By: Naomi Hanna

**Y**aakov and Eisav are two very different people with very different characteristics. The Torah describes Yaakov as a simple man who learns and shepherds his flock. Eisav, on the other hand, is described as a hairy red hunter. At the beginning of Parashat Toldot, Rivka becomes pregnant with the brothers. During her pregnancy she has a conversation with God because she is concerned that her pregnancy is not normal due to the brothers quarreling in her womb. God explains to her that the brothers are different from one another. He tells her, "Two nations (*goyim*) are in your womb, two separate peoples (*leumim*) shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). *Why does God tell Rivka that her sons are going to be two different nations using two different terms, goyim and leumim? We know that the Torah never says anything extra, so what is the significance of saying the same thing in two different ways?*

According to Sforno, the phrase *shnei goyim bevitnech* means that her two children will have two different worldviews, and two different voices on worldly problems. Sforno then adds that *ushnei leumim* means that the two children are

going to lead two separate kingdoms. Haemek Hadavar essentially says the same thing, but he reverses the explanation. He says that the phrase *shnei goyim bevitnech* that the two children are going to be two self-governing nations. He then goes on to say that the phrase *shnei leumim* means that the two nations will conduct their kingdoms, and rule over themselves differently than each other. The answers of these two commentators are very similar, but they have opposite explanations of these two phrases. I agree more with the Haemek Hadavar because based on the way God says this to Rivka, it makes more sense that *shnei goyim bevitnech* means that the children will be separate self-governed nations, and the phrase *shnei leumim* means that the nations will be run differently.

We learn from explanations of this pasuk that it's okay for people to have a difference of opinions. God tells Rivka this is going to happen and that her children are going to view things differently. In today's world, people seem to want everyone to think the same, act the same, and even run countries the same. We need to remember that it isn't a bad thing to have differences in opinion. God wouldn't have told Rivka this if it wasn't valid. We need to recognize that difference isn't a bad thing, but something that makes us unique, and when we find someone that shares our opinion, it only brings us closer together.

## Wishing the entire Ramaz community a Shabbat Shalom!

If you would like to submit a Dvar Torah or content for a future issue of Likrat Shabbat, email ([hassi@ramaz.org](mailto:hassi@ramaz.org))