

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS TOLDOS**

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TOLDOS

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS TOLDOS**

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Bereishis* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

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understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

Toldos is connected to Moshiach because it alludes to the ultimate rapprochement between Jacob and Esau which will take place in the Messianic Age.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

B"H

ESSAY ONE

CYNICISM AND DOUBTS VERSUS HOLY CHUTZPAH AND JOY

Cynics and scoffers are, obviously, not serious people and they don't have to be rational or consistent.

Their nature is to throw cold water on the enthusiasm exhibited by serious people, making some inane joke to cool off the enthusiasm of the believers and doers.

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ESSAY ONE

CYNICISM AND DOUBTS VERSUS HOLY CHUTZPAH AND JOY

Redundancy

This week's parsha begins with what appears to be a rather redundant fact. "These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac."

Why the repetition?

Rashi observes that there is a need for the Torah to repeat Abraham's relationship with Isaac to underscore that Abraham was indeed the father of Isaac and to counter the cynics (lit. "the clowns of the generation") who claimed that Sarah had conceived from Avimelech. Avimelech, the Philistine monarch, like Pharaoh before him, took Sarah as his wife after he was told by Abraham that she was his sister. When he was informed by G-d in a dream that she was a married woman, he promptly returned her untouched to Abraham. So it was natural for Abraham's detractors to claim that he was not the real father of Isaac.

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Rashi continues: “What did G-d do? He formed Isaac’s face to be a spitting image of his father Abraham. So that everyone who saw the two of them easily recognized that Abraham begot Isaac.”

With the greater miracle of Isaac’s birth being that Sarah, a ninety-year old woman, could conceive and bear a child, what good was it for the mockers to claim that she conceived from Avimelech? The magnitude of the miracle of Isaac’s birth would not be diminished one whit.

The Unsophisticated Scoffer

The simple answer is that this is precisely the nature of a cynic and a scoffer. They are not serious people and they don’t have to be rational or consistent. Their nature is to throw cold water on the enthusiasm exhibited by serious people, making some inane joke to pour cold water on the enthusiasm of the believers and doers.

In Biblical literature this cynical and mocking approach is identified with the Philistines. When Samson was captured, the Philistines mocked him and sneered at him.

Parallel with Amalek

One is tempted to draw a parallel between the cynical approach of the Philistines and the evil approach of

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another nation—the Amalekites. They, too, are identified with an attempt to instill doubts in the minds of the believers. The very word Amalek is said to be the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for doubt—*safelek*. When a person is enthusiastic about something spiritual, Amalek tries to cool off the excitement by sowing doubts. Indeed, Amalek was the first nation to attack the Jews when they left Egypt. The Midrash compares this situation to a boiling tub of water that everyone is terrified to go in. Someone then comes along, and, knowing that he will be scalded, takes the plunge and gets burnt, but succeeds in cooling off the water—both literally and psychologically—for others to follow.

A superficial analysis of Amalek and the Philistines would conclude that they share this trait of trying to desensitize people to the reality of G-d, His teachings and the unique role the Jewish people play in G-d's Master Plan for the universe.

The cynics of Abraham's and Isaac's time tried to mock the role of Abraham as father to a child who would ultimately lead to the formation of a Jewish nation that would transmit G-d's message to the world. The Philistines sought to undermine that goal, and similarly, the Amalekites sought to destroy the nascent and fledgling Jewish nation on their path to Sinai to receive the Torah. Both the

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Philistine and the Amalek motto seem to be “nip G-d’s experiment in the bud”!

Two Nations; Two Approaches

Upon deeper reflection it will become clear that there is a difference between these two evil nations and mindsets.

Though both attitudes are designed to deter people from attaining lofty goals by either mocking them or sewing doubts, there seems to be a difference. G-d does not create anything redundant. G-d would not have created two distinct peoples who would be identical in their attempts to undermine our progress.

To understand the difference between these two forces of evil it is important to examine the timing of their attacks.

The first time we meet the Philistine challenge is soon after the first Jewish child is born.

Again, when the Jews leave Egypt, the Torah relates that G-d did not take them through the Land of the Philistines. There was a concern that traveling through that area could infect the Jews with cynicism and cause them to give up on becoming a Jewish nation and convince them to return to slavery in Egypt. This explains the underlying logic of the words in Exodus: “He took them through a circuitous route and did not take them through the land of the Philistines

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lest they will see war and they will return to Egypt.” The war that would impel them to return to slavery was the war against Philistine mockery and scorn.

Only later, after witnessing the incredible miracle of the splitting of the sea and the end of the Egyptian threat, did Amalek enter onto the scene and attack them both physically and spiritually.

This difference between these two nations is echoed in the Shulchan Aruch, the authoritative Code of Jewish Law. In its opening paragraph it declares: “Do not be embarrassed by the mockers.” The message conveyed by this exhortation is that if you want to get off the ground and become or do something worthy, don’t allow yourself to be deterred by the cynics.

If we go to the end of the Code of Law that deals with our daily lives, it discusses the laws of Purim, the holiday in which we celebrate the victory over Amalek’s most infamous descendant—Haman. The very last words of that section are a quote from Proverbs: “A good heart always celebrates.”

The message is that if Purim is the Holiday that marks the defeat of Amalek’s doubts and desensitization campaign it does not suffice to celebrate Purim one day a year. One **must** extend the war against Amalek every day of one’s life. Indeed, while the cynicism and mockery of the Philistines

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cannot deter someone who is well on the road toward one's goals, Amalek never gives up. Amalek hounds us and when he is defeated, he merely changes his disguise and attacks us over and over.

In summary, the salient difference between the cynicism of the Philistines and the assault of self-doubt of Amalek is that the former generally attacks us before we get off the ground, whereas the latter never gives up. Even the most advanced person in the most advanced stages of his or her development needs to be aware of the insidious ways that Amalek tries to derail us.

In other words, Philistines' cynicism was not very sophisticated. They would never be taken seriously by any thinking person. Proof of that is the fact that they tried to minimize the excitement of the miracle of Isaac's birth by stating that Sarah conceived from Avimelech. But a thinking person would immediately realize the inane nature of that argument since it was Sarah's ability to have a child that was by far the greater miracle. Amalek, by contrast, is sophisticated and is always a step ahead of us.

What Would Amalek have Said?

If Amalek had been around in the days of Abraham, he would not have stated foolishly that Sarah conceived from Avimelech, but rather "why are you getting excited and

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making such a big deal out of G-d performing a miracle!” It is almost demeaning to think of G-d as merely a miracle worker. If anything, Amalek self-righteously taunts us, we should be impressed with the miracle of nature **rather** than with nature-busting tricks. Meanwhile, Amalek succeeds in cooling off the ardor and excitement that is generated by the miracle. Amalek is quite adept at even throwing a “curve ball” at the most sophisticated Torah scholar.

Responding to the Twin Threats

How does one deal with these twin forces of evil?

To get rid of the Philistine cynicism we must use the opposite trait of chutzpah. Don’t care what others say. That G-d forms Isaac’s face to resemble Abraham symbolizes the way that G-d altered nature as an act of defiance and holy chutzpah. In fact, the Code of Jewish Law states that one has to be careful not to allow the chutzpah needed to ward off the cynics to alter one’s personality. But, nevertheless, some modicum of holy chutzpah is the antidote to the cynical attempts of the modern day mockers to get us to not even try to grow.

Conversely, Amalek who epitomizes the wrong type of chutzpah—he is not afraid of jumping into a scalding cauldron and will take on the most sophisticated of us—is countered not with chutzpah, because Amalek is better at

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it than we are. The answer to Amalek is joy; joy that comes from a humble dedication to G-d regardless of the forces that try to demoralize us and depress us. Indeed, joy helps us destroy Amalek and destroying Amalek leads to joy, which explains why the month of Adar, in which we destroy Amalek, is the ultimate month of joy.

At the Crossroads

We are now standing at the crossroads between the era of golus-exile and geulah-Redemption. Our journey now has met with two sinister forces. For the unsophisticated and unlettered amongst us, the cynics come along and mock our sincere faith in the imminent coming of Moshiach. The Philistine cynicism and scorn has no substance and it can invade—the word Philistine actually means “invaders”—the minds and heart of those who are not able to respond logically to their taunts.

To counter these efforts, we need a healthy dose of holy chutzpah.

But for the Amalek challenge, which cloaks itself in much more sophisticated and intellectually sounding garb that attempts to sow doubts in our faith, we need to obliterate it with the humble joy that derives from the realization that Amalek's end is near.

ESSAY TWO

ALL FOR THE CHILDREN

In our mystical tradition, the shared experiences of our forefathers and us are more than just a fortuitous coincidence.

It is even more than just an omen.

When these events occurred with the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, they actually generated the spiritual energy that enabled us, their children, to go through the same experiences.

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ESSAY TWO

ALL FOR THE CHILDREN

Response to the Cynics

When the Torah introduces the progeny and experiences of the Patriarch Isaac, the Torah states:

“These are the offspring of Isaac the son of Abraham, Abraham fathered Isaac.”

The commentators raise the obvious question: why does the Torah have to repeat itself. Isn't it quite obvious that if Isaac was the son of Abraham, that Abraham had fathered Isaac?

One answer provided by Rashi is that the Torah's repetition was a response to the cynics who claimed that Abraham was not the true father of Isaac, but that Avimelech, the Philistine king who had abducted Sarah, was the real father.

To allay any such suspicions, the Torah emphatically declares that, indeed, it was Abraham who fathered Isaac. Rashi adds, that this fact was made known to all by virtue

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of a miracle that G-d performed. Isaac's facial features were made identical to that of Abraham.. Now **everyone** knew that Abraham was truly Isaac's father.

A question has been raised. If the Torah wished to stress that Abraham was the real father of Isaac— and not Avimelech—why did the Torah not make that point as soon as Isaac was born? Why did the Torah wait to inform us of the miracle until Isaac became a father?

Portent of the Future

The answer to this question lies in a better understanding of the role of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs. Their position in life was not just to be the progenitors of the Jewish people, but, moreover, their lives were a portent of what would occur in the future with their progeny. When Abraham was forced to go down to Egypt, it was a forerunner of the Israelites going down to Egypt. And when Abraham came back up from Egypt with great wealth, this was an omen that his descendants would, likewise, leave Egypt laden with immense wealth.

In our mystical tradition, this relationship between the Forefathers and their descendants is more than just a fortuitous coincidence. It is even more than just an omen. When these events occurred with the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, they actually generated the spiritual energy that

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enabled their children to go through the same experiences.

We can now understand why it was so crucial that the Torah mention that Isaac was identical to Abraham in the context of Isaac's children.

Had the cynical canard that Avimelech was the real father of Isaac just reflected on Isaac personally, the Torah would not gone out of its way to dismiss their frivolous accusation? After all, if Sarah, who was 90 years old, could have the child, why would Abraham not be able to be the father? Does the Torah have to contend with every critic and every type of criticism?

Moreover, would G-d have performed a miracle—fashioning Isaac's facial features to be a spitting image of his father Abraham—just to answer the charges made by scorners? We know that G-d does not perform miracles for no good reason. It would have been a total waste of G-d's powers to perform the miracle just to defend the integrity of Isaac.

Thus, the Torah waits until Isaac himself is ready to establish a family and set up the nucleus of a Jewish people. At this point, we do take any accusation—as frivolous as it may be—that can undermine the integrity of the Jewish nation.

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Worse than Holocaust Denial!

Throughout history, our adversaries worked very hard to discredit and delegitimize us. If they couldn't win us over to their side and convince us that their religion was superior, they would then turn against us and try to discredit every aspect of Judaism.

Holocaust denial is not the first attempt at robbing us of our history. It is just the most recent one. The enemies of Israel have tried to deny that there was ever a Jewish presence in Israel, or that there was ever a revelation at Sinai where G-d gave us the Torah.

Holocaust denial denies us the ability to even claim that we were victims; but denial of our Bais Hamikdash and of the revelation at Mount Sinai denies us our very identity as Jews.

When the Torah informs us that G-d goes out of His way, as it were, to perform a miracle, not just for Isaac's sake, but for the sake of his descendants, we are, in effect, being told that G-d will never let our enemies get away with their canards about the genesis, history and character of the Jewish people.

Moshiach=Validation

We are living in momentous times. Because we are at the

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verge of the Messianic Age, at which time, the Jewish people and their mission in life will be fully vindicated, validated and fulfilled, our enemies are making their last stand to strip us of our dignity and destiny.

This is not a time to despair, however, because we are confident that once more, G-d will expose the calumnies of the modern day cynics and show the entire world that we are the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the rightful heirs to Biblical tradition, including, and particularly, possession of the Land of Israel.

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ESSAY THREE

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE A SPLIT PERSONALITY

Every one of us possesses two distinct personalities.

We are in possession of an animal soul and a G-dly soul.

**Every act of goodness is another victory for the G-dly soul
in us.**

**Our struggle is made easier when we realize that,
ultimately, we will win the war against evil.**

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ESSAY THREE

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE A SPLIT PERSONALITY

How was Rebecca Comforted

Rebecca is enduring terrible pains during her only pregnancy. Upon seeking G-d's counsel she is told that she is carrying twins who will grow up to become two rival powers. They will be engaged in an incessant struggle for supremacy. Ultimately, the older one will serve the younger one, she was informed.

Strangely enough, Rebecca was calmed by the knowledge that she is destined to become the mother of two brothers-nations who will be in a constant battle! The question begs to be asked, how could her painful pregnancy be made more tolerable by knowing that she will give birth to this rivalry?

Furthermore, travail within pregnancy is not unusual. Why is Rebecca's suffering given so much attention in the Torah?

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Going in Both Directions

We can gain some insight into Rebecca's dilemma and how she dealt with it, by referring to the words of our sages on this matter. Our sages state that Rebecca's pain – both physical and emotional – came as a result of a bizarre phenomenon. Whenever she would pass a house associated with idolatry she would feel labor pains. It seemed as if her fetus was attracted to this evil place and wanted to be born. When she passed a house of worship and study (that existed even before Sinai, as our sages state) she felt identical pains, suggesting that her unborn child was attracted to holy places.

“What kind of a child was this to be?” was Rebecca's true concern. Did this child possess a split personality?

Moreover, Rebecca knew that she was destined to become the mother of a special nation. She realized that her personal experience during her pregnancy portended the nature of the Jewish people. Did the schizophrenic behavior of this unborn child augur an insecure future for the Jewish nation?

If this child would have had a negative character she would have accepted this as a challenge to alter and refine its nature. Certainly, if the child was destined to be good and holy, she appreciated her role as the one to nurture this

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goodness and holiness. But, what was she to do with a child that was unstable? This is why Rebecca was so disturbed.

When she was informed that she was destined to have twins and that they would be engaged in a struggle for supremacy, her fears were allayed. There was not one contradictory entity, but two distinct forces that would do battle with one another. Rebecca had no illusions about the challenge that was in store for her and her progeny. There would be a constant battle of good versus evil, but ultimately the good will prevail.

Our Twin Personalities

Every one of us possesses these two distinct personalities. We are in possession of an animal soul and a G-dly soul. When we, on occasion, alternate between good and evil, we should not denigrate the good we did and conclude that it was disingenuous, or that we are mixed up and unstable. We are in possession of **two distinct souls** that are struggling for control over us. Every act of goodness is another victory for the G-dly soul in us and should be appreciated.

Our struggle is made easier when we realize that, ultimately, we will win the war against evil. This message underlies the prophetic words spoken to Rebecca: "the older one will serve the younger one." The simple meaning

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is that ultimately the Jewish nation will no longer be oppressed by the more powerful nations represented by Esau.

On another level, the “older one” is an allusion to the animal soul which enters the person at birth and is therefore older than the G-dly soul that is not fully manifested within the person until Bas or Bar Mitzvah.

Bas and Bar Mitzvah can also be applied collectively to the future Age of Redemption. As we live in the era of Galus-exile, the “older” animal soul still maintains its seniority; at least, for most people. And, although we all have a G-dly soul, it has yet to manifest itself fully. We are, in some ways still spiritually immature and preparing for our Bar Mitzvah when the G-dly soul will make a powerful appearance. When that happens, the Animal Soul will be harnessed to serve the interests of, and gladly acquiesce to, the younger” G-dly soul.

ESSAY FOUR

MULTIPLE BIRTHS

Jacob was so named because he held on to the heels of Esau as he was being born.

But, the word heel associated with Jacob also symbolizes the trait of humility.

In addition, the *yud*, the first letter of Jacob's name, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, reinforces the theme of humility possessed by Jacob.

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ESSAY FOUR

MULTIPLE BIRTHS

Sextuplets!

Septuplets are in the news today. The birth of the seven McCaughey babies has sparked a lively controversy about the ethics of fertility drugs and other issues.

This event is not the first time the world was abuzz with excitement and consternation over multiple births. True, in the story to which we are referring, there were not seven, but two, that were born, but their personalities and destinies proved more exciting and momentous than a dozen births.

Two Destinies: Light and Might

We are speaking of the birth of the twin brothers Jacob and Esau, discussed in this week's parsha. Rebecca goes through a most difficult pregnancy and is told by prophets that she is carrying twins. These twins, she is informed, will one day become rival powers that will be at each other's

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throats until the end of time. These twins represent two distinct ideals; two distinct paths and two distinct destinies.

Jacob personifies the pursuit of light, Esau the quest for might.

Jacob devotes his early life to “dwelling in tents” of Torah study, as our sages tell us, preparing himself for his future involvement in the mundane world. His Torah study ensures that he remains impervious to the negative influences of the outside world.

Esau, conversely, spurns the future rewards associated with the birthright because of his need to satisfy his craving for food; for instant gratification.

Jacob is the one whose outer strength and courage belied his inner gentleness and purity. This is symbolized in Jacob getting “dressed up” as Esau so that he can get the blessings from his father Isaac that had been intended for his brother Esau. When Isaac heard him speak after feeling his hairy arms, he exclaimed, “The hands are the hands of Esau, but the voice is the voice of Jacob.” Externally, Jacob sometimes had to appear rugged and strong, but his core was always pure and refined.

Esau, conversely, was a violent, rebellious person, who covered up his evil ways with sweet talk and hypocritical pious questions. (The Talmud tells us that, to impress his father, he would ask how – in addition to tithing

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agricultural produce – one tithes salt. This super-pious question was meant merely to cover up his truly vile and hideous nature.)

Jacob was the progenitor of the Jewish nation, who is chosen to bring the peace to the world through the light of Torah; whereas Esau, the ancestor of Rome, symbolizes the desire for world conquest and domination.

Jacob, the ancestor of the entire Jewish nation, stands for a mission to lead the world to the Messianic Age, when the world will be filled with the glory of G-d, whereas Esau is the symbol of the forces of exile that seek to prevent the Messianic Age.

Heel versus Complete

Jacob was so named because he held on to the heels of Esau as he was being born. But, the word heel associated with Jacob also symbolizes the trait of humility. In addition, the *yud*, the first letter of Jacob's name, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, reinforces the theme of humility possessed by Jacob..

Esau on the other hand means, "complete." He was so named because when he was born he was fully developed with his hair. Figuratively, it implies that he did not

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consider himself in need of any change or improvement, because he was “complete.”

Jacob and Esau thus represent the opposite values of: humility and arrogance; righteousness and evil; violence and peace, exile and Redemption.

These were a unique set of twins. There could not have been people as diametrically opposite as these two brothers.

But as in the McCaughey case, there will be a happy ending to the twin saga as well.

The Rapprochement

The Jewish prophets have predicted the rapprochement between Jacob and Esau of old. Ultimately, even the Esau's of the world, will come around to respecting the Jewish people. Indeed, in our time, we have witnessed the collapse of the “Soviet Union,” the modern era's' most powerful and tyrannical empire. Esau, in fact, is also identified as Edom-red, the color that is associated with the former communist regime.

All of the recent geo-political changes that have occurred mostly in Europe are clear indications that just as the initial prophecies have already come true, so too will we soon see the fulfillment of the concluding prophecies: the

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genuine and complete Redemption, through our righteous Moshiach. Then, indeed, will the saga of the multiple births end on a happy note.

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ESSAY FIVE

OUT OF SIGHT

Isaac was spiritually sensitive to any form of evil.

His sensitivity derived from his being offered as a sacrifice and his eyesight was affected by the “tears” of the angels, symbolic of the angelic purity that was instilled in him from that time onward.

As he matured, his spiritual sensitivity and intolerance to evil grew to the extent that it actually affected his physical ability to see the physical world around him.

Isaac thus was unable to appreciate the true nature of his son Esau and wanted to give him the blessings.

Isaac was totally oblivious to Esau’s true evil nature.

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ESSAY FIVE

OUT OF SIGHT

Isaac's Eyes Dimmed

Isaac's vision was dimmed and as a result he could not discern between his two sons Jacob and Esau. When Isaac wanted to bless his son Esau — thinking that this might be his last opportunity to do so — Rebecca commanded Jacob to bring food for Isaac so that he might receive the very special blessings Isaac wished to confer on Esau.

Had Isaac's vision not been affected this confusion would not have occurred and Jacob and his heirs — the Jewish people — would not have received the blessings.

Indeed, our sages declare that the dimming of Isaac's vision was deliberate on G-d's part to facilitate the deception that conferred blessing on the Jewish nation.

Why Deception?

That Jacob received the blessings through deception has been amply discussed by all commentators. They suggest

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that it was Esau who was the real deceiver. Esau was the one who had sold the birthright for a pot of lentils, despising the birthright that represented the legacy of Abraham and Isaac. Pretending to be a loyal child, Esau spurned all that was holy and meaningful to his parents, while always posing as the faithful child. Esau was guilty of the ultimate hypocritical deception of his own father.

Jacob, conversely, was rightfully the “first born son” in the legal and spiritual sense and was therefore the rightful beneficiary of his father’s blessings.

It is odd, however, that Jacob’s receiving the blessings hinged on the fact that Isaac’s eyesight had dimmed. Had Isaac been able to see, he would have known it wasn’t Esau and he would not have blessed him. Why does blindness seem to play such a pivotal role in Jacob’s receiving of his father’s blessings?

Cause of Blindness: Spiritual Sensitivity

Let us step back and see how Isaac originally lost his sight. According to one opinion it were the tears of the angels that touched his eyes as he was about to be sacrificed by his father Abraham on Mount Moriah that adversely affected his eyesight.

According to another opinion, Isaac’s inability to see was a

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result of the smoke of the incense that Esau's idolatrous wives burned to their pagan deities.

On the surface it would seem that the smoke was an irritant that physically affected his vision. There is, however, a deeper understanding of the cause and effect relationship between the idolatrous smoke and Isaac's infirmity. And upon deeper reflection we shall see that these two events are related.

Isaac — more than any of the other Patriarchs — was spiritually sensitive to any form of evil. Isaac was the only Patriarch who was not permitted to leave the Holy Land. This sensitivity derived from his being offered as a sacrifice. The “tears” of the angels are symbolic of the angelic purity that was instilled in him from that time onward.

As he matured, his spiritual sensitivity and intolerance to evil grew to the extent that it actually affected his physical ability to see the physical world around him. Thus, he could also not tolerate to see his daughters-in-law burning incense to idols, and his sight was lost entirely. Isaac had so transformed himself that he could not see evil; it was outside his range. The more that evil existed near him, the more he became oblivious to it.

Isaac thus was unable to appreciate the true nature of his son Esau and wanted to give him the blessings. Isaac was totally oblivious to Esau's true evil nature.

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Isaac's inability to see Esau's evil was indicative of Isaac's own spiritual greatness —his inability to relate to evil — that put him in a position where he could not discern between Jacob and Esau. This left Jacob no choice but to take the blessings through subterfuge.

In the Messianic Age — of which it says, “the spirit of impurity I shall remove from the earth,” we will be able to lay claim to all the blessings without the need for subterfuge and deception. Then it will be clear to Isaac that Jacob— the Jewish people — are truly deserving of all the great blessings.

ESSAY SIX

ESAU IN 3D

Esau is the symbol of the world around us that can be viewed in 3d.

One can be impressed by its veneer of glitter, or cynically view it from within as a rotten world. But the 3rd dimensional way of viewing the world – the Chassidic perspective – is that it possesses a powerful spiritual dimension that “hovers” above it.

Our mission is to so change the world now so that in the Messianic Age even Esau will be refined.

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ESSAY SIX

ESAU IN 3D

Shining the Light of the Oral Torah

Of the many places in the Torah, where the text must be understood in light of the Oral tradition, this week's Parsha's narrative concerning Jacob and Esau stands out.

Jacob, the progenitor of the Jewish nation is praised throughout the Tanach, while his brother Esau is always maligned. When one reads this week's Parsha, one seems to get a very different picture. Esau is an obedient son, whom his father likes and chooses to bless over his brother Jacob.

Jacob, by contrast, "extracts" the birthright from his brother Esau for a pot of lentils when he was so weary that he was about to die. Jacob, many years later, goes along with his mother Rebecca's "scheme" to "steal" the blessings from his brother Esau.

How is it then that Jacob is regarded as our righteous forefather, whose memory we invoke every time we want

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to elicit G-d's mercy? Esau, on the other hand, is always viewed as the symbol of evil and hatred towards the Jewish nation and the very ideals of righteousness.

Our sages, in whose hands the Oral interpretations to the Torah that were handed down to Moses at Mount Sinai were placed, shed light on the entire matter.

Esau's Crime Spree

Esau's entire life was a deception. He was the ultimate hypocrite. He would constantly attempt to deceive his father by asking him questions such as "How does one tithe salt and straw?" By feigning piety, he succeeded in impressing upon his father that he was truly entitled to the blessings.

According to the Oral tradition, when Esau returned from the forest weary and asked Jacob for the lentils he was cooking, there was much more to the story than what meets the eye. Esau, our sages tell us, had just returned from a crime spree. He had committed murder, rape, adultery and idol worship. But, this was not just any day that he chose for his induction into a life of immorality and evil. This was the day that his beloved grandfather Abraham died.

By postponing his criminal career until after the passing of

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his grandfather, but, no sooner that Abraham passes away he commits the most heinous crimes, Esau exhibits a shallow and perverse sense of sensitivity. For a child to so dishonor his parents and grandparents was a sign of his inherent disrespect for everything they stood for.

To add insult to injury, when Esau returns from this crime spree, he sees the lentils Jacob was preparing as the meal that one feeds mourners. Rather than “paying his respects” to his parents, literally and figuratively by showing some modicum of respect for their ideals, Esau just wants to swallow the food and is prepared to give away his birthright for it.

The first born enjoyed the privilege of carrying on the legacy of his parents. Esau demonstrated his utter contempt for the birthright and all that it stood for. Whatever fragment of decency and piety Esau possessed was only on the surface.

The Anomaly

One can raise the obvious question, why did the Torah not state explicitly that Esau was a vicious criminal, who had utter contempt for his parents’ and grandparents’ ideals? Why are we given two versions of the same person? The written Torah portrays him as the obedient child who is cheated out of his blessings, whereas the Oral Torah

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depicts him as a scoundrel and loathsome criminal.

To resolve this anomaly one must refer to the Inner, or “third dimension” of the Torah, the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus. Esau, to be sure, was a lowly person, precisely as he is described in the Oral tradition. But, Esau’s spiritual roots were very holy and even more closely connected to Isaac than were Jacob’s.

Esau’s problem was that he was not “in touch” with his own spiritual source. In the terminology of Kabbalah, his spiritual source “hovered” above him, but could not be internalized. This “superior” holiness manifested itself in the superficial way Esau showed respect to his parents. In effect, both descriptions of Esau are accurate.

Third Dimension View

Esau is the symbol of the world around us that can be viewed in 3d. One can be impressed by its veneer of glitter, or cynically view it from within as a rotten world. But the 3rd dimensional way of viewing the world – the Chassidic perspective – is that it possesses a powerful spiritual dimension that “hovers” above it. Our mission is to so change the world now so that in the Messianic Age even Esau will be refined. All the elusive spiritual energies that cannot now be absorbed will be accessed and fully internalized. At that point, we will see the complete

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rapprochement between Jacob and Esau, that will usher an age of universal peace and harmony.

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ESSAY SEVEN

THE BIRTHRIGHT IN THREE STAGES

Our mission now therefore is to “buy the birthright” from Esau in a figurative sense.

This means that we should live our lives now as we imagine we will live our lives in the imminent Age of Redemption.

We should recognize that the Jacob aspects of our lives are the dominant ones.

In the Rebbe’s words “We should live with Moshiach.”

The challenge today is to create that link between the original idea conceived by G-d and the future world of perfection by living that way right now.

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ESSAY SEVEN

THE BIRTHRIGHT IN THREE STAGES

Holding the Heel

This week's parsha features the birth of Jacob. It seems that everything about his birth was unusual. To begin with, his mother Rebecca's pregnancy was a difficult one. She was baffled by the way the children were struggling within her and she sought Divine guidance as to what was going on. She was told that she was carrying twins who would become the progenitors of two nations that would be engaged in a perennial struggle.

And then another strange thing occurred. When her twins were finally born, Jacob was holding on to Esau's heel. For this reason, the Torah tells us, he was named Jacob, because the name Jacob contains the word heel (*akev*) in it.

Why was Jacob holding on to Esau's heel? And why was that significant enough that he was named Jacob? Whenever we refer to Jacob we are always reminded that he held on to Esau's heel? Why is that fact so crucial for us to remember?

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Rashi seems to have anticipated these questions and provides us with a Midrashic explanation, which, Rashi states, is consistent with the simple understanding of the text:

“He [Jacob] was holding on to him [Esau] to prevent him [from being the first born].”

Rashi then goes on to explain that in truth Jacob was conceived first. But Jacob also wanted to be the one to emerge the first as well so he held on to Esau’s heel.

In a separate comment Rashi provides the reason why the Torah emphasizes that he held on to Esau’s “heel.” It is to indicate that it will be the descendants of Jacob who will take away Esau’s descendants’ power at the end [heel] of their rule.

Rashi’s comments need to be clarified. We still cannot fully understand why Jacob had to hold on to Esau’s heel to establish his birthright. If Jacob was actually conceived first then he was in reality the first born. And if that does not suffice, and to be called the first born one must emerge first, how did holding on to Esau’s heel change the fact that Esau emerged first?

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Establishing Birthright: Two Systems

Whenever we consider the degree to which one aspect of a process assumes overriding importance (birthright) over other aspects there are two ways it can be determined.

The first is to see where and when the idea, person or event originated; to trace the process back to its conception.

For example if there are two competing ideas about a person's course of action and we want to determine which idea should take precedence, it is reasonable to prefer the idea that arose in our thoughts first.

Another example in the realm of selecting a person for a particular job where there are two people applying for it. Here too it is rational to choose the person who applied first, or who had a head start in that particular field.

Or if it is a question of assigning the credit for influencing a person to go in the right path, we can logically ascribe the credit to the person who introduced the beneficiary to this new lifestyle rather than to the people who were chosen to actually educate that person.

There is however a second approach that gives precedence to the one that actually concretized that idea and allowed it to emerge from its potential state.

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In short, in all areas of life we can discern two competing considerations: Do we give precedence to the conception of an idea or process or do we give precedence to the actualization of that seminal idea?

Upon reflection we can say that this was the crux of the dispute between Jacob and Esau. Is Jacob the first born because he was conceived first, or is it Esau was first to emerge? Who was right?

It seems incredible that on the face of it Esau was justified in claiming that he was the first born. If that were not the case, and Jacob was truly the first born because he was conceived first, why did Jacob have to purchase the birthright from him, as recounted in this week's parsha?

Moreover, in Jewish law, there is no question that when there are twins, the distinction of the first born is always given the one who emerges first, regardless as to who was conceived first.

Sandwiched

To resolve this difficulty, Jacob held on to Esau's heel. In doing so, Jacob was predicting that in the end of days—known as the “**heels** of Moshiach”—Esau's power will end and Jacob will be on the ascendency. In this way, Jacob was providing a counter argument to Esau's claim of the

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birthright. While it is true that the one who emerges first is the firstborn that is only accurate because in our world of action we must go by the reality we can see. Ideas come and go. We must be governed by the reality that goes beyond the stage of theory and endures, at least to the extent that we can observe.

But, with regard to Jacob and Esau, Jacob was not only the “first in thought” and conception; Jacob would also ultimately hold on to and bring an end to the heel of Esau. Jacob would supersede any temporary supremacy of Esau based on the here and now.

So while Esau had the advantage of the present reality, Jacob’s claim to the birthright was based on the fact that his reality “sandwiched” Esau’s reality. To Jacob belonged the beginning and the end. This is reflected in his two names, Jacob and Israel. Jacob signifies the heel and end and Israel contains the word “*rosh*-head.” Jacob was head and heels over Esau.

Esau, still had one advantage. There is a third element in determining the status of the firstborn. In terms of the here and now Esau was indeed the first born. Conception is only a potential state. The future decline of Esau was for G-d and prophets to determine, but everyone knew that Esau emerged first and was legitimately the first born.

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Jacob by purchasing the birthright from him acquired that third element as well. Now Jacob was the first born on all three counts: He was conceived of first, he held on to the heels of Esau, meaning that he will outlive Esau's power and gain preeminence in the end of days, and now he also had purchased the temporal benefit that Esau still enjoyed.

Moshiach: Past, Future and Present

When G-d created the world, He first conceived of a world in which G-d's essence and the goodness that flows from it will pervade all of existence. As our Sages comment on the words that appear in the beginning of Genesis, "And the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters" that it refers to the "spirit of Moshiach." In the words of the Talmud (Sanhedrin): "The world was created for Moshiach," suggesting that G-d's original thought in the process of creation is a Messianic world. He envisioned a perfect world; a world where Jacob will no longer be dominated by Esau. Esau will recognize, respect and cherish the special relationship G-d has with the Jewish people—their birthright. And, as a result, all of the evil associated with Esau will cease and the world will give way to its original plan conceived by its Creator.

It is therefore clear that the beginning is about Messianic perfection and the end is the full materialization of that

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plan. What is lacking temporarily is the world the way it is today, where Jacob is still affected by the challenge posed by the various Esau's of the world.

Our mission now therefore is to “buy the birthright” from Esau in a figurative sense. This means that we should live our lives now as we imagine we will live our lives in the imminent Age of Redemption. We should recognize that the Jacob aspects of our lives are the dominant ones. In the Rebbe's words “We should live with Moshiach.” It does not suffice to believe in his imminent arrival and the complete Redemption that will occur. The challenge today is to create that link between the original idea conceived by G-d and the future world of perfection by living that way right now.

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ESSAY EIGHT

A CLEAN SLATE

**The Messianic Age will represent a total departure from
Roman culture and values.**

**Moshiach will inaugurate a world wiped clean of the
Roman's imprimatur.**

Moshiach will write the story of life on a clean slate.

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ESSAY EIGHT

A CLEAN SLATE

The Perennial Struggle

The perennial struggle of the Jewish nation originated with the struggle our forefather Jacob had with his brother Esau even before they were born.

The Torah relates how Rivkah experienced severe pain in her pregnancy and sought G-d's counsel. She was told that she would give birth to twins, and that they would be the fathers of rival nations. Even at the moment of their birth there were signs of a struggle for supremacy:

“And the first one emerged... and they named him Esau. And afterwards, his brother emerged, and his hand was grasping Esau's heel, and he named him Jacob.”

Jacob, our Sages tell us, was attempting to hold Esau back so he could be the first born. Esau ultimately sold his birthright to Jacob, which he bitterly regretted later when Jacob “deceived” his father into giving him the blessings.

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A Blank Piece of Paper

The Midrash relates how a certain Roman official asked the Sage Rabbi Yehoshua, “Who will seize the reins of government after us?” Rabbi Yehoshua took a blank piece of paper and wrote: “and his hand was grasping Esau’s heel.”

Rabbi Yehoshua’s gesture was a not so subtle way of suggesting that the Jewish nation would prevail in the end over Esau and his Roman heirs. Rabbi Yehoshua was referring to the Messianic Age, when all nations of the world will recognize the sovereignty of Moshiach, and witness him usher in an age of universal peace.

The question, however, is why did Rabbi Yehoshua write this message down? Couldn’t he have stated that answer orally? If Rabbi Yehoshua was afraid to provoke the Roman official by speaking words, he certainly could not have expected to provoke him less by putting this powerful message in writing. Writing those words was not a subtle way of declaring the downfall of the Roman Empire!

Moreover, once the message was committed to writing there was a real danger that it might be seen by more hostile Roman leaders, notorious for their barbaric cruelty towards the Jews, particularly when there was hint of Jewish rebellion.

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We also have to understand why the Midrash mentions the fact that Rabbi Yehoshua took a blank piece of paper. What difference did it make whether the paper had some extraneous writing on it or it was totally blank?

Messianic Age: Writing on an Erasure or on a Clean Slate

The following is based on the Chassidic work Arugas Habosem:

The Romans knew that the Jewish nation and its values would ultimately prevail and triumph over Rome and its value system. They were well aware of the eschatological Biblical predictions of the ultimate Messianic Redemption. That alone did not disturb them because their focus was not on the future but on the here and now. However, they were curious to know whether the triumph of Jewish values would be a total repudiation of Roman values or would traces of Rome survive and even contribute to Messianic utopia.

By taking a blank sheet of paper, Rabbi Yehoshua intimated that the Messianic Age will represent a total departure from Roman culture and values. Moshiach will inaugurate a world wiped clean of the Roman's imprimatur. Moshiach will write the story of life on a clean slate.

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Ethics of the Fathers discusses the difference between a person who studied in his youth and one who began studying in old age. The analogy it draws is a comparison between writing on a blank sheet of paper versus writing over the erasure of earlier writing. In the latter instance a trace of the erased writing will interfere with and muddle the new.

Similarly, Arugas Habosem argues, Moshiach will not merely erase the “writing” of Rome. Moshiach will begin anew, writing on a completely new sheet of paper with no trace of the past.

Contradiction?

On the surface, this explanation appears to contradict the Rebbe’s well-known message that Moshiach will not negate the positive features of exile. Moshiach will embrace the positive elements of exile and “merely” insert an aleph, which stands for *Alufo shel Olam* - the Master of the world, into the word and concept of Golah-exile. In so doing, Moshiach will transform the word and the world of Golah-exile into Geulah-Redemption. The sole difference between the words Golah and Geulah is the modifying letter Aleph. All of our positive accomplishments will remain intact.

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The Rebbe describes three specific dimensions of the inserted Aleph, which represent three stages of development:

The first change, represented by the simple meaning of the Aleph as Master, is our appreciation for G-d's role in everything we do. The world's people will recognize how G-d is invested in every aspect of their lives. By inserting the Aleph and sparking recognition of G-d's role and value in everything, the retained positive features will be greatly enhanced. It is the obfuscating character of exile that does not allow us to truly and fully appreciate and enjoy its positive elements.

The next stage will be the insertion of G-d's "mindset." The Rebbe based this on the alternate meaning of the word Aleph, which is knowledge. In the present Galus era, we possess a limited ability to comprehend G-d's intellect. Only G-d's "emotions" are evident in the world. We see G-d's love and compassion just as we see His anger and judgment. We don't see the rationale behind everything. That will change in the Messianic Age. We will be exposed to G-d's way of "thinking," as it were. Again, this will not repudiate the past, but profoundly enhance it.

The third stage will represent insertion and realization of G-d's transcendent dimension going beyond even His intellect. This too is related to the word Aleph, which when

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rearranged spells *peleh*, meaning wonder. We will experience the most sublime divine revelation, but it will manifest itself within the parameters of our previous Galus existence. There will be no abrupt change from or rejection of past qualities and achievements.

How can we reconcile this approach with the thesis that Rabbi Yeshoshua's writing about the triumph of Jacob on blank paper signaled the belief that Moshiach represents a totally new slate.

Old World; New Mindset

In truth, there is no contradiction. When Rabbi Yehoshua was repudiating Rome, and by extension the Western civilization that succeeded Rome in dominating the world, he was not referring to their positive contributions. It was the mindset of these societies that will disappear forever.

What is it about the mindset of Rome that Rabbi Yehoshua found so troubling?

The answer can be found in a Talmudic story telling of the reaction of the Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to the suggestion that Rome should be given some credit for its building of roads and bridges, etc.: "They do it for their own selfish glory." Rabbi Shimon's words eventually reached the ears of Roman officials and he was sentenced

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to death. For the next 13 years he was forced to hide in a cave until the coast was clear.

Rome embodied the heretical approach to life where the person who enjoys G-d's abundant blessing exclaims: "My strength and the might of my hand have accumulated this wealth for me." The bridges and roads the Romans built, along with all the other positive accomplishments of Western Civilization, will endure in the Messianic Age. No trace of the arrogant and heretical attitude associated with Rome and its heirs could and will survive. Simply erasing and writing over that mindset will not suffice. Moshiach will introduce a totally new and refreshing way to look at the world and our own lives. When we insert the Aleph—in all of its incarnations—into Golah we are not simply adding a letter. Rather, we are afforded an opportunity to see the past in a totally different and novel fashion; we see the world from G-d's perspective, the way He created it in the beginning prior to the intrusion of alien ideas.

So while all the positives of our lives in exile will remain, the perspective by which we view these positives will represent a total departure from the past. We will see the world as it was when it was indeed a clean slate, prior to all the messy and distorted "writing" superimposed on it.

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Two Scenarios

An alternate way of reconciling these two visions of the future—whether it will be a clean slate or incremental changes that retain the past—is by referring to a dispute in the Talmud between Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Eliezer. They argued as to which month is the most opportune time for Moshiach to come. According to Rabbi Yehoshua it must be the miraculous month of Nissan, whereas Rabbi Eliezer maintained that it would be Tishrei, the month associated with creation and nature.

It has been suggested that these two opinions principally differ on whether the Messianic Age will come in a natural way or will be punctuated with miracles.

Rabbi Yehoshua held that Moshiach's coming would be associated with Nissan, the month in which we celebrate Pesach and its many miracles. He championed the idea that the future Redemption too, will be of a supernatural order. Hence, Rabbi Yehoshua was correct in asserting that no trace of Rome (read: the natural order associated with the period of Galus and Rome) will be left. A totally new world order will emerge.

According to the dissenting view, which Maimonides embraces, the Messianic Age will occur in a natural order, therefore Galus conditions will not be repudiated. Instead, they will be enhanced and illuminated.

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Whichever way G-d chooses to bring the Final Redemption, our heartfelt prayer to Him is bring it now, we are ready!

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ESSAY NINE

WE ARE ALL FIRSTBORN!

Eisav disenfranchised himself from G-d's community.

Can a Jew can do the same today.

If that were the case, G-d forbid, millions of assimilated Jews, who do not identify with the claim of being G-d's firstborn, will not be redeemed by Moshiach.

The answer has already been provided by the Rebbe:

"No Jew will be left behind.!"

Once we were liberated from Egypt and chosen as a people at Mount Sinai, we have for all times become G-d's firstborn. No Jew, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, can ever renounce his or her Jewishness.

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ESSAY NINE

WE ARE ALL FIRSTBORN!

Eisav's Five Sins

Eisav, Jacob's older twin, nonchalantly sells his birthright to Jacob for a pot of lentils in this week's parsha. The Torah considered his act so egregious that it concludes this episode with the words "And Eisav disgraced the birthright." If there were any doubts about his disregard, and even contempt, for the privilege of being the first born, they were completely dispelled when Eisav said nary a word of protest or regret after he had consumed his meal. It is only decades later, when Jacob wrests Isaac's blessings from him, that Eisav raises Cain about Jacob's appropriation of the birthright.

Our Oral Tradition, preserved in the Talmud (Bava Basra 16b), reports that Eisav had actually committed five major crimes on the day he exchanged his birthright for a plate of "red stuff": "He violated a betrothed maiden, committed murder, denied G-d's existence, denied the Resurrection of the Dead and he disgraced the birthright."

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Commentators are puzzled as to why the Written Torah would single out what appears to be the least reprehensible of his transgressions, the disgracing of the birthright, while not mentioning a word about his other, far more heinous, crimes.

The Liberation

One way to clarify this omission is to understand the deeper meaning of the birthright that was so precious to Jacob and so insignificant to Eisav.

When G-d sent Moses to Pharaoh to demand liberation for the Jewish people, Moses stated: "This is what G-d said; "Israel is My son, My firstborn." Rashi relates a Midrashic explanation to link this declaration that the Jewish people are G-d's "firstborn" with Jacob's purchase of the birthright: "Here G-d signed on the birthright that Jacob purchased from Eisav."

The association of G-d's demand to liberate the Jews in Egypt with the birthright Jacob purchased from Eisav, allows us to infer that our Redemption (liberation from Galus) hinges on our role as firstborn. Jacob prophetically realized that possession of the firstborn's privilege would enable his progeny to get out of Egypt and all other subsequent periods of exile.

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Being the firstborn was not only a matter of biological and chronological precedence; it also carried a profound spiritual potential to overcome any and all obstacles.

Double and Infinity

The potency of this ability is symbolized by the law that grants a biological firstborn a double portion of his father's inheritance. The very concept of "double" here is related to Redemption. The Midrash cites five examples where the Torah doubles up on a key word. The idea of liberation is hinted in each of these repetitive statements. The most familiar liberation-repetition is the one G-d used for the Exodus from Egypt: "Remembered, I have remembered."

The Rebbe explains that to break through all the barriers that exist we must have "double" power. "Double" does not just mean twice as much; it also expresses the idea of an idea or force that is constantly replicating itself. Hence, the power of liberation is synonymous with an extended meaning of "double", i.e., infinity. This is the power vested in the birthright that Jacob prized and Eisav disdained.

Idolaters Yes but Assimilationists No?

When the Jews were liberated from Egypt even the idolaters amongst them were redeemed. G-d did not

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winnow out the unrighteous. Indeed, no matter how heinous the crime a Jew might have perpetrated in Egypt, he or she received the chance to be a part of the nascent Jewish people and receive the Torah at Mount Sinai.

There was one notable exception to G-d's Grace. Those Jews who did not want to be liberated were left behind. According to the Midrash, they perished during the plague of darkness and were quickly buried before the light returned. G-d did not want the Egyptians to know that a large number of Jews were also stricken by a plague.

The question has been raised, why would G-d liberate idolaters but not those who assimilated or had a slave mentality and were not emotionally ready to leave?

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos*, volume II p. 1-7) explains that the idea that Jews can never be excluded from the Jewish community and Jewish destiny, no matter how serious their transgressions, was introduced at the Exodus from Egypt. Upon leaving Egypt, the Jewish nation acquired the status of G-d's "firstborn." They were G-d's children no matter how serious their deviation from the desired norm. However, their status as G-d's firstborn child only attached to them if they wished to join the Divine "family" and be attached to G-d, as a child is to his or her father. Those who chose to remain behind in Egypt were, in effect, rebelling against the essential relationship that would have

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allowed them to be liberated. They rejected their special role as G-d's firstborn.

Thus, the Rebbe explains, the very rationale G-d uses to override transgressions is the Jew's firstborn status invested in every Jew. However, if those who did not want to leave Egypt refused their birthright how could they gain the status as firstborn? It is instructive here to consider the Jew who mistakenly expects his Yom Kippur atonement to negate his sin of eating on that very day. Yom Kippur can atone for any sin but only so long as the sin does not negate the very power of Yom Kippur. The Rebbe, citing the Ragatchover Gaon, applies the Talmudic expression: "A prosecutor cannot become the defender (in the same case, obviously)." One cannot invoke the atoning power of Yom Kippur for the sin that is an affront to Yom Kippur. A child cannot reject his relationship with his parents while simultaneously demanding that they forgive his rebelliousness since he is their child"

Similarly, the Jew who spurned his status as G-d's firstborn could not see his sins mitigated by his status of G-d's firstborn.

Eisav's Most Egregious Sin

We can now understand why Eisav's most serious transgression was rejection of his status as the firstborn.

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Although his other four sins, enumerated above, are considered among the most serious breaches of behavior and faith, G-d could have found a way for Eisav to redeem himself. Indeed, this would have happened if Eisav had embraced his status as the firstborn, and thus claimed his special relationship with G-d. By exchanging this unique status for the ephemeral relief from hunger and weariness, Eisav lost his chance to redeem himself from his other severe violations.

Thus, while the Talmud records the Oral Tradition's version of Eisav's criminal exploits on that day, the Written Torah cites only the sale of his birthright. In this way, the Torah gets right to the root of Eisav's downfall and the ultimate degeneration of his descendants into tyranny and anti-Jewish behavior. Indeed, the exile we are in—since the destruction of the Second Temple—is called the Exile of Rome, which our Sages trace back to Eisav. The root cause of all the misery and oppression of this Exile was Eisav's lack of desire to be connected to his parents' and grandparents' legacy; he spurned what would have been his unbreakable link to G-d.

Jacob saw into the future and realized that he must salvage the birthright, for in it lays the power of ultimate triumph over the forces of tyranny and exile.

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A Disturbing Question

One can still raise a disturbing question about rejection of the birthright in our own day and age:

Just as Eisav disenfranchised himself from G-d's community and the liberation dynamic, so one might well wonder whether a Jew can do the same today. If that were the case, G-d forbid, it would raise the awful possibility that millions of assimilated Jews, who do not identify with the claim of being G-d's firstborn, will not be redeemed by Moshiach.

The answer has already been provided by the Rebbe in the talk cited earlier. The Jews of the Exodus era were left behind due to their reluctance to become part of the Jewish community of G-d's firstborn children. Today, the Rebbe asserts, **no Jew will be left behind**, because once we were liberated from Egypt and chosen as a people at Mount Sinai, we have for all times become G-d's firstborn. No Jew, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, can ever renounce his or her Jewishness.

This, the Rebbe states, is essentially what we say to the "Rebellious Son" at the Seder when he objects to the Passover ritual: "If you had been there, you would not have been redeemed!" These stinging words actually manifest themselves as words of encouragement. In this view, their emphasis should be seen as attaching to the word "there." If the rebellious son, who wants nothing to do with

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liberation, had been in Egypt prior to the Exodus and missed the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, he would have shared the grim fate of those who refused to become part of the Jewish nation. However, now, the author of the Haggadah intimates, “you have no choice; you will be redeemed because you are a Jew!”

The only choice we have before us now is to decide whether we experience the imminent Redemption without our willing participation and in spite of our lack of desire for it, G-d forbid, or because of our fervent prayers and efforts to bring about the final Liberation.

ESSAY TEN

THE TWIN BAR MITZVAH

The myth is that a Messianic Age will bring about a reduction of responsibility and will serve essentially as a universal “senior citizen” retirement experience as a reward for all of our good work.

When Moshiach will take us out of exile, we will all celebrate our collective Bar and Bas Mitzvah, when our Judaism will blossom and our Mitzvos will be performed in the most complete and ideal way.

Every Bar or Bas Mitzvah can thus be said to be a sample of the future Redemption.

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ESSAY TEN

THE TWIN BAR MITZVAH

Parted Ways at 13

The first Bar Mitzvah in the Torah can be traced back to this week's Parsha. The Torah describes how the twin boys of the Patriarch Isaac and Matriarch Rebecca went in different directions when they "grew up":

"And the boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents."

Rashi, the principle Bible commentator, comments that as long as Jacob and Esau were children, one could not determine by their actions who they really were. Once they reached the age of thirteen, however, Jacob went to the *Bais Hamidrash* - House of Study, while Esau gravitated towards houses of idol worship.

The question has been asked. Didn't Jacob attend the House of Study before his Bar Mitzvah? Does not our Oral

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tradition inform us that even before he was born, Jacob was naturally attracted to Houses of Study? Whenever his mother past a House of Study Jacob wanted to leave his mother's womb to go there. Certainly, after he was born, Jacob would have desired to study Torah, not just on the day of his Bar Mitzvah?

Determining their Real Choices

One answer to this question lies in the fact that before his birth Jacob had the “urge” to go to a House of Study only when his mother past one. That suggests that when Jacob was in an environment of Torah, when he passed a House of Study, **that** was when he was drawn by its influence. Esau ,on the other hand, had the opposite inclination. According to our Sages, whenever his mother passed a house of *Avodah Zarah*-idolatry he had an urge to go there. In spite of Jacob and Esau’s proclivities before they reached the age of maturity, it was still not clear what each of them would choose if they would be in a neutral environment; if there was nothing to attract them to either place.

When they reached the age of Bar Mitzvah, however; when they became independent of their mother and her influence, this is when it became clear what their real inclination in life was. At this point, everyone knew that Esau really wanted no part of his parent’s legacy, not just

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because he might have been influenced by his environment, which, at that time was idolatrous and corrupt. Esau had assimilated his cultures mores and values into his own.

Similarly, Jacob chose to go to the Houses of Study not simply because he followed the example of his parents and was in a positive environment, but because it became **his** choice.

Separated

This is likely what Rashi meant when he writes "When they became thirteen years old, this one "separated" to the Houses of Study and the other "separated" to the Houses of Idolatry." What does Rashi mean when he says, this one "separated?" What did they separate from? Rashi should have simply said, "This one went etc." What does the word "separated" imply?

Rashi seems to be saying that as long as they were still "attached" to their environment, one did not know if their behavior was due to their own efforts and inclinations, or it was due to the influence from others. However, when they "separated," when they were no longer attached to their respective environments and sources of influence, nevertheless, "this one 'separated' to the Houses of Study and this one 'separated' to the House of Idolatry" — it was clear who they really were.

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Bar Mitzvah: More Mitzvah and Less Bar

A Bar Mitzvah is not only when a child is considered mature enough to assume the obligations of an adult. After all, many children before the age of Bar Mitzvah fulfill many of the Mitzvos and carry out their obligations admirably. Why do they have to wait for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah to be considered an adult?

The answer is that a Bar Mitzvah is when all of his actions begin to count as **his** actions; when Mitzvos acquire their full force of holiness, because they are the Bar Mitzvah boy's or the Bas Mitzvah girl's own personal observances. Just as a Mitzvah without intent and feeling is not a complete Mitzvah, because it is missing its soul, so too, a Mitzvah performed by someone under Bar Mitzvah, where part of the motivation and intention comes from one's parents and environment, is not a complete Mitzvah.

Whatever is true about every individual is true about the Jewish people as a whole. Our sages say that Mitzvos we perform now are mere preparations for the Mitzvos we will do in the Messianic Age.

Contrary to the myth that a Messianic Age will bring about a reduction of responsibility and will serve essentially as a universal "senior citizen" retirement experience as a reward for all of our good work, Judaism believes that Moshiach will bring more integrity to all of our observances. In our

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present state of exile, our Mitzvos are, by definition, incomplete.

Whatever we do now can thus be compared to the actions of a pre-Bar-Bas Mitzvah child, whose actions are deemed incomplete because they are not the independent expressions of that individual child, but are attributable to his parents, teachers, peers and the general environment. When Moshiach will take us out of exile, we will all celebrate our collective Bar and Bas Mitzvah, when our Judaism will blossom and our Mitzvos will be performed in the most complete and ideal way.

Every Bar or Bas Mitzvah can thus be said to be a sample of the future Redemption. At a Bar Mitzvah, it is customary for the father to recite the blessing, "Blessed is the One who relieved me of this liability," referring to the child's transition from dependence on his parents to spiritual independence. May we see, imminently, how our Father-in-Heaven recites the blessing that will relieve Him and all of us from the liability of exile.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

REVERSING THE REVERSAL

Torah to us is more than just a powerful teaching;
it is the most intimate aspect of our lives; we are married
to it.

This intimate relationship with Torah is based on its Divine
nature, which connects to the Divine aspect of our souls.

Denying the Divine dimension of Torah is tantamount to
violating the integrity of the Torah.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

REVERSING THE REVERSAL

Eisav's Crime Spree

It is axiomatic that every detail of the Torah, including its narratives, is significant and contains a message for all times.

In the beginning of this week's parsha the Torah relates that Eisav came in from the field famished and asked Jacob to feed him some of the lentils that he was cooking. Jacob asks Eisav's birthright in return, to which he readily agreed. The Torah derides him for this: "...he ate and drank; he got up and left. Eisav despised the birthright."

The Midrash explains that on that very day Abraham had passed away. The lentils cooked by Jacob were the traditional food served to mourners.

If Abraham's family was busy mourning his passing, what was Eisav doing out in the field? And why does the Torah state that he came in from the field exhausted?

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The Midrash states that while Isaac and Jacob were mourning the loss of Abraham, the paragon of virtue, Eisav was out on a crime spree. That day, the Midrash states, Eisav committed three major sins: murder, violation of a betrothed maiden and disgracing his birthright.

The 16th century commentary *Ma'asei Hashem* explains that these three crimes represented Eisav's repudiation of the three fundamental principles of Judaism, upon which the Thirteen Principles of Faith enumerated by Maimonides are founded

Eisav and the Immortality of the Soul

These principles are the existence of G-d, the Divine origin of Torah and the immortality of the soul.

Eisav's commission of murder, *Ma'asei Hashem* explains, can be understood as his denial of the existence of the immortal soul. The Torah says as much when quoting Eisav's rejection of the birthright, "I am going to die so why do I need the birthright." By saying this he expressed his belief that there was no life beyond the physical world; a tacit denial of the afterlife and the immortality of his soul. The murder he committed was the metaphorical destruction of his own soul. In addition, an actual physical Murder is also denial of the humanity and soul of the victim. Moreover, murder separates a person's soul from

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his body, but if there is no soul than there can be no murder.

Maimonides' enumeration of the Thirteen Principles of Faith does not include belief in the immortality of the soul. However it is contained in the principle of reward and punishment. When we don't see good people rewarded for their good deeds and evil people punished for their evil doing, it is because G-d's reward and punishment might be deferred until the soul's departure from this world.

Eisav and the Divinity of the Torah

Eisav's violation of a betrothed maiden metaphorically refers to his rejection of Torah as a Divine writ and a G-dly way of life. This analogy is based on the Torah's self characterization as a *m'orasha*, which means inheritance but is translated by the Talmud as *m'orasa*-betrothed.

Torah to us is more than just a powerful teaching; it is the most intimate aspect of our lives; we are married to it. This intimate relationship with Torah is based on its Divine nature, which connects to the Divine aspect of our souls. Denying the Divine dimension of Torah is tantamount to violating the integrity of the Torah; a betrothed maiden.

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All Firsts are Connected

Eisav's rejection and denigration of his birthright parallels a denial of G-d's existence. The reason the firstborn enjoys a special status, *Ma'aseh Hashem* explains, is that all firsts are reflections of G-d, the ultimate First Cause. Denial of the preeminent status of the first born is a subtle rejection of belief in a G-d who precedes all else and who brought all else into existence.

This understanding of the integrity of the "firsts" also explains the different responses G-d had to the offerings of Cain and Abel. G-d accepted Abel's offering because he, and not Cain, brought the "**firstborn** of his sheep." Cain, we might suggest, did not ascribe any importance to the first because he believed as did Plato and Aristotle that the world always existed and to him G-d was not the First. G-d, to Cain, was a force superimposed on the world, which needed to be placated with a sacrifice to keep it off his back. In his mind, there was no need to express profound gratitude to Him as the very Source of all that exists. To believe that the world is immortal independent of G-d is, in truth, a less than subtle rejection of G-d's mastery and unity, and, by extension, a rejection of G-d's Essence.

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Adam's Heresy

Reflection on and examination of Midrashic and Kabbalistic sources shows that the three principles denied by Eisav were already under assault, starting at the very dawn of humanity.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 38b) states that Adam denied G-d. Obviously, Adam could not have denied G-d's existence, but his partaking of the forbidden fruit represented a concrete form of denial. The Talmud states that the serpent convinced Adam and Eve that G-d created the world only after He partook of the Tree of Knowledge. In order to accept this notion Adam had to have believed that G-d was not the First Existence.

Another manifestation of Adam's heresy was his attempt to hide his nakedness from G-d. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge stimulated him to think he could hide from G-d. This was a denial of G-d's omnipresence, which is tantamount to denial of G-d's transcendence of time and space.

Another interpretation of Adam's denial is based on the understanding that the Tree of Knowledge represents secular philosophy which, when left to its own devices, can lead a person to reach heretical and atheistic conclusions. Thus, even if Adam himself did not deny G-d's existence, he did sow the seeds for, and introduce into the world, a

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discipline which would eventually prove to be a significant source of denial.

Sensual Desire and Tainted Humanity

Adam, the Midrash states, was also guilty of the sin of forbidden relations. This may be traced back to the way the Torah characterizes Adam and Eve's desire for the forbidden fruit. It uses terminology that is strikingly close to that used to discuss the lust and sensual desire that causes one to engage in illicit relations. Moreover, their transgression and submission to the serpent, the embodiment of evil, injected impurity into the human condition, which infected Cain and caused the death of Abel.

In short, we can see that the three vices associated with Eisav had their genesis with Adam.

Patriarchal Reversal

The Kabbalists, based on various Midrashic sources, explain that the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were the first humans to reverse the damage caused by Adam and Eve's sin.

Abraham devoted his life to promote belief in and awareness of one G-d. Wherever he went he declared that G-d is the Creator of the world. Moreover, he also

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influenced others to declare G-d as Creator. Thousands of pagans embraced strict Monotheism as a result of Abraham's efforts.

Isaac, by allowing himself to be a sacrifice, we are taught, atoned for the bloodshed that was introduced into the world as a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin. We have seen that bloodshed is a denial of the immortality of the soul and the afterlife. Isaac, our Sages teach, actually died at the Akeidah and was resurrected. This alludes to the fact that the soul lives on and can never be destroyed; it can and indeed will be restored to the dead in the age of the Resurrection after the Final Redemption.

Our Patriarch Jacob brought further atonement for the immorality associated with Adam and Eve. As was discussed above, forbidden relations with a betrothed maiden is a metaphor for undermining the divinity of Torah. Jacob was therefore described as one who "dwelled in tents," a reference to the tents of Torah study.

However, their joint accomplishments were not without some formidable challenges. On the last day that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived contemporaneously, Eisav attempted to sabotage their joint accomplishments by violating these three fundamental principles, whether by actual deed or in his perverted theological mindset.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

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Throughout the last 3,500 years since the days of the Patriarch's and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, we have been laboring in our efforts to reverse Adam and Eve's shortcomings. These efforts were begun by the Patriarchs, particularly, Jacob, in neutralizing the influence of Eisav and his heirs.

Moshiach's Perfection of the Three Ideals

We now stand on the cusp of the Final Redemption through Moshiach, when these three cardinal sins, in all their incarnations and nuances, will be removed permanently.

Moshiach, the leader who ushers in this glorious age, is imbued with the most sophisticated awareness of G-d's presence. The prophet Isaiah (11:2) describes Moshiach thus: "The spirit of G-d will rest upon him..."

Moshiach will also prove himself by demonstrating his total dedication to the Torah and will be the ultimate teacher of Torah. Even Moses will be one of Moshiach's students of Torah.

Moshiach also distinguishes himself by his possession of the highest soul power, known in Chassidic literature as the *Yechidah*. It the loftiest part of the soul; it is most intimate with G-d. Revelation of this level leads to unmitigated life.

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Moshiach will ignite the Yechidah of each and every one of us, which will lead to the Resurrection of the Dead and eternal life.

Chassidus is the Force of Redemption

The message for us is that in these last moments of Galus we must prepare for the future Redemption by, among other preparations, focusing on the three primary tenets of Judaism: the belief and awareness of G-d as the First; our intimacy with Torah; and third, realization that the soul is eternal and so is its life with the body in the Age of the Resurrection.

The study of Chassidus is the direct approach to achieving a sophisticated awareness and understanding of these three principles. Chassidus focuses on making G-d a reality in our consciousness. It is the part of Torah through which its divinity is fully exposed and, as the Yechidah/soul of Torah, it enables us to reveal our own Yechidah. This is the sacred path to eternal life, as our Sages state that the Resurrection will occur by G-d feeding us “the dew of Torah.”

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ESSAY TWELVE

DIGGING DEEP

In the Messianic Age, when the light of G-d will pervade the world and the attribute of kindness will extend to all, we will then be able to focus all of our energies to the Isaac modality of gevurah, digging deep to ensure that the purist and holiest energies are exposed. Even the “outsiders” will appreciate the pure and refreshing waters of Torah.

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ESSAY TWELVE

DIGGING DEEP

What do we Know about Isaac?

This week's Parsha devotes more space to the Patriarch Isaac than any other Parsha. Nevertheless, Isaac's life and accomplishments remain an enigma because of the relatively scant treatment his life receives in the Torah. We know that Abraham was a man of great faith in G-d, and obedience to His will. Abraham also devoted his life to justice and righteousness. He traveled from place to place teaching monotheism to the world. Abraham was a generous and gracious host to all who built an inn at Beer Sheba from which to proclaim G-d's mastery and unity to the world.

Similarly, Jacob's life is discussed at great length. Jacob is praised as a diligent student. His dialogues with and promises to G-d are recorded in the Torah, demonstrating his profound faith and devotion to Him.

When we read what the Torah has to say about Isaac, however, not only do we have a dearth of information about his

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life and accomplishments, but even what we do find are enigmatic.

A Well Digger

Isaac, the Torah recounts in this week's Parsha, would dig wells. Some of his wells were contested by the Philistines who claimed them as their own. Isaac, however, persisted until he would dig a well that was not contested.

What is going on here? Why does the Torah not speak about Isaac's kindness, his piety, his devotion to G-d? What is so significant about the digging of wells? And how do we apply the digging of wells to our own spiritual lives?

In Chassidic literature we are taught that everything the Patriarchs did - even their material and "secular" activities - were in actuality reflections of deep spiritual experiences. While it is certainly true that Isaac literally dug wells to find fresh water, he was simultaneously going through a profound spiritual quest that was consistent with his unique spiritual composition.

While Abraham is identified with the Divine attribute of Chesed, which means kindness, Isaac is identified with the Divine attribute of Gevurah, which is usually translated as severity. How does this trait manifest itself?

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The Gevurah Personality

Gevurah, is the very opposite of Chesed. Chesed is outward bound. The Chesed individual reaches out to extend a helping hand to another. Chesed oriented individuals are usually extroverted, who seek out people on whom to shower their love and generosity.

Gevurah oriented people, by contrast, are inward bound. No, they are not selfish or self-centered. They do strive to remove any superficial or ulterior motives that may sully the purity of their actions. They, therefore, reach in to themselves, digging deeper and deeper into their soul's interior to find the pure and unadulterated "waters." They are naturally inclined to introspection and demanding higher standards for themselves and others. By nature they are also very often harsh and judgmental of others, not because they are cruel or unkind, G-d forbid, but because they seek to purify and help the others discover their inner G-dly nature.

This is why the Torah describes Abraham as one who would constantly travel and meet with others, while Isaac rarely traveled and even when he did, G-d told him to restrict his movements to the Land of Israel. Isaac's role and legacy to us is to spend time with ourselves and on deepening the level of devotion of others.

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While we give precedence to the Abraham model of showing kindness and reaching out to others, we must also devote some time to the Isaac modality of digging deeply within ourselves; peeling away the layers of negativity and superficiality from our and other's souls, until we find the refreshing pure waters within.

Isaac Will Dominate in the Future

The Talmud relates that in the Messianic Age, the Patriarch who will stand out will be Isaac. Today, in the period of exile that leads to the Messianic Age, we must put the emphasis on the Abraham model of kindness and reaching out, even at the expense of the exercise of "digging wells." True, the product might not be as pure, but we cannot wait to help another until they are pure. We cannot spend all of our time digging a few wells here and there when we can be reaching countless number of people with the message of Torah and kindness.

With the advent of the Messianic Age, when the light of G-d will pervade the world and the attribute of kindness will extend to all, we will then be able to focus all of our energies to the Isaac modality of *gevurah*, digging deep to ensure that the purist and holiest energies are exposed. Even the Philistines, who were identified Biblically as the ultimate cynics and skeptics, will concede that the well

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belongs to Isaac. Even the outsiders (the Hebrew word Philistines is cognate to the word that means to invade) will appreciate the pure and refreshing waters of Torah. And that is the time of which the Psalmist sang: "Then we will fill our mouths with *schok*-laughter," the very meaning of the word Isaac-"he will laugh."

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

BRINGING THE FUTURE INTO THE PRESENT

The Tanya, citing the Zohar, states that even the Satan truly wants us to deny his blandishments and resist the temptation to sin.

However, the Satan cannot show that desire because it would undermine the test and sabotage the mission for which he was chosen.

Esau is the symbol of the Satan. He is in a perennial struggle to destroy Jacob. But, deep down he wants Jacob to prevail.

This will be fully revealed in the Messianic Age when there will be a total reconciliation between Jacob and Esau.

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

BRINGING THE FUTURE INTO THE PRESENT

Jacob's Double "deception"

Esau comes home from the field, weary and on the verge of death and asks Jacob to feed him some lentils. Jacob asks him to sell his birthright in return. Esau is happy to oblige him, as the Torah recounts.

Years later, Esau comes to regret his sale of the birthright. Isaac, sensing that his end was near, summons Esau and offers to bless him. Rebecca overhears them and has Jacob disguise himself as Esau and get the blessing instead. When Esau realizes that he has lost the blessings to Jacob he cries out:

Is that why he was called Jacob? He has deceived me twice! He took my birthright, and behold, now he has taken my blessing!

Why does Esau invoke the birthright? If indeed Esau had gladly sold his birthright to Jacob, as was the case, it would justify Jacob receiving the blessings from Isaac that were intended for the first born. Since Jacob possessed the

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birthright with Esau's full complicity, Esau hardly had a case against Jacob. Why then did he cry out about the birthright, which was harmful to his own case and buttressed that of Jacob?

Esau, who was not known for honesty or integrity should have skipped over that fact. He should have complained that Jacob stole his blessings as the rightful first born son and owner of the birthright that went along with being firstborn!

Another question has been asked. Why does Esau say "and behold, **now** he took my birthright." Why "now?" He could have put it, "and behold he has taken my blessing!"

Esau's True Inner Desire

One may offer an answer based on the Chassidic understanding of the Evil Impulse known as the Yetzer Hara or the Satan, who is charged by G-d to entice us to sin.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (known as the Alter Rebbe) in his classic work, the Tanya, citing the Zohar, states that even the Satan truly wants us to deny his blandishments and resist the temptation to sin. Satan is compared by the Zohar to the harlot who is paid by the king to test the prince's morals. In truth the king wants nothing more than

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his son's rejection of her advances, which the harlot also knows. While she has been commanded to use all her charm to ensnare the prince, she would be more pleased and more greatly rewarded if, in spite of her doing everything to seduce the prince, he would not succumb.

The Satan too truly wants us to resist his efforts at getting us to sin but cannot show that desire because it would undermine the test and sabotage the mission for which he was chosen.

Esau is the symbol of the Satan. He is in a perennial struggle to destroy Jacob. In a later parsha, Jacob is confronted by an angel, whom our Sages identify as Esau's angel, the Satan.

When Esau condemns his brother for taking his blessing, usurping his power to entice people to sin, he "drops" a hint that the Satan's real inner desire is that the person resist all the pressure and stay blessed thereby avoiding the curses of the Satan. Esau therefore invokes the selling of the birthright to Jacob as his subliminal means of strengthening Jacob's claim and the procurement of the blessings.

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Why the P.R.?

However, notwithstanding the Satan's true inner intention he cannot publicize it. G-d has given him the unenviable mission to be an enticer, seducer and trouble maker par excellence. That is his G-d given role and he may not, until Moshiach comes, compromise his job. How then can we suggest that Esau was dropping hints that undermined his effort to take the blessings away from Jacob?

The Power of Teshuvah to Remove the Curses

It may be suggested that there is one exception to that rule that the Satan cannot undermine his own case. When a person seeks to do Teshuvah (repent and return to G-d), G-d helps the person make that happen. His assistance comes in the form of a license given to the Satan/Yetzer Hara to "slip up" in his efforts and provides the person with ammunition to keep the blessings.

The Midrash states (on the words "Now, O Israel, what does G-d your G-d, demand of you?"): "The expression 'now' refers exclusively to Teshuvah." Thus Esau, the Satan, adds the word "now" as a way of telling us, the progeny of Jacob, that "if you do Teshuvah I will vouch for your blessings and justify your right to them on the grounds that you were given the birthright."

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Jacob the Man of the Future

On a simpler level, but in a fashion no less didactic than the preceding explanation, we can explain why Esau added that Jacob took the birthright from him.

The reason Esau was so eager to dispense of the birthright when he did was that he presumed that the birthright was a spiritual gift that carries with it responsibilities, the dividends of which will not be realized until the next world. For one who doesn't care for the responsibilities and does not want to wait for his or her reward in the next world, the birthright would be useless.

Thus, Esau reasoned that the birthright truly belonged to Jacob, who always demonstrated his interest in the future. Indeed, this was indicated by his name, Jacob, which implies the future. The first letter is a *yud* which, in Hebrew grammar, denotes the future tense. Moreover, the second part of his name *ekev* means heel, or "at the end."

The name Esau, on the other hand, is related to the word "action," referring to this physical world.

When Jacob appropriated the blessings from his father, Esau was livid. If the birthright was intended for the next world how could Jacob, in good conscience, take the blessings intended for the here and now?

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Thus, Esau cries to his father, he is called Jacob not because he is focused on the future, but because he is devious. He wants the birthright of the future and also the blessings for the present. He wants the proverbial cake and to eat it too.

Yet we know that Jacob was sent to receive his father's blessing by Rebecca. She was greater in prophecy than her husband as was true of all the Matriarchs. Jacob was certainly not guilty of any crime for taking the blessings. Proof of that is that Isaac essentially endorsed and confirmed the blessings to him even after he discovered the ruse.

How could this be? How should we respond to Esau's argument that the birthright was intended for the future not for this world? Furthermore if Jacob knew that the birthright was also for the here and now, and Esau was not aware of it, that would have rendered the sale of the birthright null and void because it was sold under false pretenses.

The Future is *Now*!

The answer lies in Jacob's uncanny power to introduce the future into the present. Jacob, while engrossed by the worldly pursuits of this world, was also totally focused on the future.

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It is said of all the Patriarchs that G-d gave them a taste of the future in this world. This is especially true of Jacob, about whom it was said that he received an eternal inheritance and that he, metaphorically, corresponds to the Third Temple, which will stand forever. Abraham and Isaac, by contrast, represent the two Temples that were destroyed in the past.

Rabbi Akiva's Laughter

One of the greatest Sages of the Talmudic period was Rabbi Akiva. His name is an Aramaic version of Jacob. There is a fascinating correlation between Rabbi Akiva and Jacob in this very regard. Rabbi Akiva was also capable of seeing the future in the present.

The Talmud relates how when they saw the ruins of the Bais Hamikdash Rabbi Akiva's colleagues cried while he laughed. When they expressed bewilderment at his laughter he explained that in this very tragedy of the destruction he saw the prophetic promise of rebuilding and glory. Despite his appreciation for the ruins in which the Temple now lay (he too rent his garments upon witnessing the sad spectacle), he could also laugh because he saw the future in the present.

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Application for Today

One can find a useful application of the above for the present day and age. While there are few Jacobs and Rabbi Akivas with us, we have the benefit of living in the very last moments of exile where we can already sense some of the future. The Rebbe exhorted us to “open our eyes” to see the Messianic reality before our very eyes.

Rather than creating a new reality, the Rebbe revealed to us that we merely have to uncover the existing reality; the future already exists in the present.

Linkage

Here is how to link the explanation of why Esau's complaint combined both the loss of birthright and the loss of the blessings, on one hand, with the preceding explanation concerning Teshuvah.

One of the most important properties of Teshuvah is that it can transform the past. This is possible because Teshuvah returns us to our core soul, which is a part of the Divine for whom past, present and future are one. Thus, the power of Teshuvah can also get us into the future.

This might explain why Rambam connects Teshuvah with Redemption. When we do Teshuvah we travel into the

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future even as we still have our feet rooted on terra firma. This is precisely what our role in preparing for Redemption entails: bringing the future into the present.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

VIVE LA OLD AGE

The energy and verve with which youth is associated is more than just commendable, it is indispensable.

It is the catalyst for the future Redemption.

However, it does not negate the virtue of advanced age and its potential for advanced maturity and spirituality.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

VIVE LA OLD AGE

Jacob's Purchase of the Birthright

This week's parsha chronicles the genesis of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, which Biblical and rabbinic literature see as the archetype of future rivalries between the Jewish people and the other dominant nations of the world in whose lands we have been subjects. One pivotal story sets the stage for the divergent ways and philosophies of the two brothers.

When Esau comes from the field one day he approaches Jacob who was then cooking a pot of lentils. Esau asks Jacob to literally stuff some of the lentils down his throat. Jacob, in response, asks him to sell him his birthright (Bechorah), to which Esau readily agrees.

Contrary to the anti-Semitic charges that poor, starving vulnerable Esau was exploited by the "crafty" Jacob, the Torah itself testifies that "Esau disgraced the birthright." The birthright in this instance was not just the distinction of being called the oldest son; it was not just a financial

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advantage with regard to an inheritance, it represented the assumption of the role of spiritual heir to the legacy of Abraham and Isaac. It represented the role of priesthood; a person whose entire life is dedicated to serving G-d. That was absolutely not Esau's vision of his future life.

Jacob, who sensed Esau's materialistic bent, was convinced that he would not want the birthright. And if it were thrust in his lap he would not know what to do with it or care about living in accordance with its dictates.

Why Lentils?

To put things into sharper focus, the Midrash reveals that Esau had just returned from a crime spree, committing five heinous crimes against man and G-d, including murder. How can Jacob allow him to take the honored and sacred birthright "hostage?" He felt compelled to acquire it from him in a legal and consensual manner.

The plot thickens. The lentils were the traditional food given to a mourner. Our tradition informs us that Jacob was cooking lentils because his father Isaac was in mourning over the passing of his father, Abraham. Abraham, our Sages tell us further, was "taken" by G-d before his time so that he wouldn't live to see the "nachas" from his grandson Esau; the day that he would make a conscious decision to disavow his connection to Abraham's

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legacy of ethical monotheism. There can be not greater or more tragic irony that Esau wanted to partake of the lentils that symbolized Abraham's death that was caused indirectly by Esau's most recent crime spree!

But how did Esau explain why he was so eager to dispose of the birthright?

Commentators explain Esau's rationale by focusing on the words Esau used to reject the birthright: "I am going to die, so why do I need the birthright?" What did he mean by these words? If the birthright was some amorphous spiritual benefit in which he had no interest he should have just said, "I don't care for the birthright." Why did he have to preface that rejection with the words "I am going to die?" Doesn't everyone die, yet we seek to retain the good things we have?

When Death Really Begins

One approach to this question is based on the work entitled *Divrei Shaul* by Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson, a nineteenth century prolific Bible and Talmud commentator and one of the most prominent authorities of Jewish law:

A wicked person begins to die the minute he or she is born. It is a gradual and degenerative process. Their lives are essentially about physical existence and physical

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existence by definition is about decomposition. The Medieval Bible commentator, Rabenu Bachaya ben Asher states: "An infant, from the moment he is born, he begins to atrophy. If one's life is defined strictly by its materialistic and physical properties, it is subject to the law of diminishing returns. Therefore the more materialistic a person is the more they fear aging and its attendant diminution and denial of physical activity and pleasure.

The righteous, on the other hand, have a reverse view of aging. The older they get the closer to the truth they get. The older a student of Torah one becomes the more they know and the deeper they comprehend the Torah's enduring teachings.

The birthright is a distinction accorded to one who is the oldest child. It is a sign of respect ascribed to one because he enjoys chronological seniority. This honorific title of *bechor*/first-born can only appeal to one who appreciates the gift of advancing through life and growing intellectually, emotionally and spiritually with every passing day even as they lose some of their physical strength and capabilities.

Of course, we pray to G-d to give us good health and not forsake us in our senior years, but regardless of the good health that seniors enjoy their physical abilities are not the same.

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Anochi – I – My Essence

Esau therefore exclaims, “I am going to die,” meaning “I am slowly experiencing death with every passing moment. Why then would I want to add insult to injury and be known as the eldest brother and assume a role that is the very antithesis of my life’s philosophy?” Esau essentially stated that he worshipped the god of youth and anything that smacked of “old-ness” in any form or shape he resisted.

It is interesting to note that Esau, in his repudiation of the birthright, uses the Hebrew word “anochi” for “I” instead of the less emphatic “Ani.” Anochi connotes my essence and being. Esau was stating—consciously or subconsciously—“I, whoever I am, am on the road to death. My life is not a celebration of those things that are enduring and permanent. I neither need nor desire a symbol of spiritual progress, if it is at the expense of my idol—youth!”

“Give me Youth or Give me death!”

In our society, we see an increase in people’s lack of appreciation and respect for old age. We try to hide our wrinkles; we’re all only 39 years old, ala Jack Benny, etc. Tragically, there are people who reach a certain age where they are incapable of doing the things they were accustomed to doing in their youth because of physical limitations and who lose their desire for life. In some

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extreme, although not so rare, situations they fade quickly. Their motto sounds like “give me youth or give me death!”

But, that was the Esau mindset; and it is completely out of line with Jewish values and all that the Jewish people stood for that enabled them to survive as a people. Because we respected old age and were prepared to learn from their experience, our tradition was never broken. The chain of tradition that we spoke of last week is well and alive because we linked to our elders, our “first-born.”

Now there is certainly nothing wrong with appreciating the virtues associated with youth; on the contrary! In an earlier essay we cited the prophecy concerning the Messianic Age that G-d “will restore the hearts of the fathers **through** the children.” The energy and verve with which youth is associated is more than just commendable, it is indispensable. It is the catalyst for the future Redemption. However, it does not negate the virtue of advanced age and its potential for advanced maturity and spirituality.

Indeed, in the prophecies concerning the Messianic Age we are told that a day will come when we will see old men and women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem, attesting to their importance in the scheme of our survival and ultimate liberation.

The message the above conveys is the importance of finding meaning and purpose in our advanced years. What

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we might lose in terms of our physical prowess we must make up for in terms of our spiritual assets. Retirement and advanced age means more time to study Torah, volunteer, dispense with advice based on life experiences, etc. These are precious moments and opportunities not to be underestimated or squandered.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

CAN'T CHANGE YOUR LANGUAGE

A Jew can and in some cases may, figuratively speaking, put on the clothing of other cultures.

A Jew can engage the outside world, interact with it and be a part of it, insofar as the external aspects of the world are concerned.

But when it comes to our essence, A Jew will discover that try as he might, he cannot help himself.

His or her Jewish soul will inadvertently emerge in his or her speech, and reveal their true essence.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

CAN'T CHANGE YOUR LANGUAGE

“The Voice is the Voice of Jacob, and the Hands are the Hands of Esau.”

In this week's parsha, the Torah relates how the Patriarch Isaac, sensing that his end might be near, summons his son Esau so he could impart his special blessings to him. But first, he asks him to go hunting, and bring him the food that he Isaac preferred. When Rebecca overhears this conversation, she tells her son Jacob to dress in Esau's clothing, so that his father will think that he was Esau, and then he will receive the blessings.

When Jacob comes to his father and serves him the special meal Rebecca prepared and gently and reverently asks his father to partake of the food, Isaac is confused. He expresses his bewilderment by asking Jacob, “Are you my son Esau or not?” After touching and feeling him he exclaims: “The voice is the voice of Jacob, and the hands are the hands of Esau.”

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From the above narrative it is clear that Jacob was almost caught in this ruse. His voice almost gave him away. According to Rashi, it wasn't the sound of his voice but the manner in which he spoke. Jacob was soft-spoken, polite and reverential. In addition, he would always invoke G-d in his conversations.

Why Didn't Jacob Disguise His Voice?

The question can be asked. If Jacob was trying to deceive Isaac into thinking that he was indeed Esau, why didn't he disguise his voice? Why didn't he try to mimic Esau's brusqueness and irreverent style of speech?

This question is magnified in light of Jacob's fear—that he initially expressed to his mother—that he would be caught and that would bring curses on him rather than blessings. If so, why did he take a chance and risk being cursed by his father—with all that this curse would have entailed—by not trying to mimic Esau's manner of speech?

Two intertwined answers come to mind, both of which carry important messages for us in our own lives.

A Give Away

The first approach is based on the words of the Haggadah—indeed, our Sages tell us that this entire event

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with Jacob and the blessings occurred on Passover—that introduce the Four Son's sayings: "A wise son, what does he say." The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe provided the following revised rendition of this phrase: "A wise son, what he truly is, he says." While a person can dress in ways that are totally not in consonance with his nature and value system, a person will always give himself or herself away by their way of speaking.

And while the way one dresses can give us some insight into a person, it merely exposes some of the more peripheral aspects of a person's personality. Our speech, by contrast, reveals so much more of who we really are. (It also works the other way around. The words we use can help to shape and mold our essential character.)

Hence, when Jacob came before his father Isaac, even if he tried to disguise the sound of his voice, he discovered that he simply could not alter the way he spoke, inasmuch as it was a reflection of his inner nature. He just couldn't help it; good and G-dly words just rolled off his tongue.

Engage but don't Change

The lesson from this explanation is that a Jew can and in some cases may, figuratively speaking, put on the clothing of other cultures. A Jew can engage the outside world, interact with it and be a part of it, insofar as the external

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aspects of the world are concerned. But when it comes to our essence, A Jew will discover that try as he might, he cannot help himself. His or her Jewish soul will inadvertently emerge in his or her speech, and reveal their true essence.

The second approach as to why Jacob did not alter the manner of his speech can be offered by way of a story:

No Betrayal, No Matter What!

When the Lubavitcher Rebbe was in Vichy France during the Second World War, they were registering people by their religion. The Rebbe was not home at the time. The person who registered him wrote down that he was "Orthodox." When the Rebbe heard of this, despite the obvious danger to his life, he quickly went to the authorities and had them change his registration to "Jewish." His reasoning that he offered was that he did not want to be separated from his G-d and his religion even on paper, since the word Orthodox might have implied that he was a member of the Greek or Russian Orthodox community and was not Jewish.

A Jew, by dint of his or her nature, cannot and will not even say or write something that can be considered a betrayal of his or her most cherished beliefs and principles. Jacob's inability to change his manner of speech thus could

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have very well been a conscious decision on his part. “Come what may,” he might have reasoned, “I cannot betray the legacy of my father and mother by perverting the integrity of my speech. I will not leave G-d out of my vocabulary. And while I might try on Esau’s clothing and even use some measure of deception to claim the blessings that are rightfully mine, but offered to Esau because he had successfully hoodwinked his father, I will not change my essence—my loyalty to G-d.”

The lesson is obvious and powerful: Whether consciously or sub-consciously, a Jew’s essence will always come to the fore, even if it would seem to be to their detriment.

Twin Phenomenon on Display

As we get closer to the coming of Moshiach, we see the twin phenomenon of Jews—while feeling quite comfortable wearing the “clothing” of Esau and having become an integral part of all strata of society—have nevertheless not lost their manner of speech. This has manifested itself in many ways.

One tragic expression of this was seen and heard a few years ago when the terrorists murdered the Jewish journalist Daniel Pearl of blessed memory, may G-d avenge his blood. In his last words, he proclaimed proudly his Jewish identity. His words expressed his true essence.

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May we see the time when a Jew will proclaim his or her Jewish identity in peace with the imminent coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

RECEPTIVE TO BLESSINGS

Of all the sacrifices we can make to make us worthy of the Messianic blessing it is the sacrifice that involves changing our habits for the purpose of helping another or going against our nature in the fulfillment of any Mitzvah.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

RECEPTIVE TO BLESSINGS

Isaac Loved Esau's Food. Why?

When Isaac summons his son Esau for the purpose of blessing him before he dies, Isaac asks him to go out and hunt, and then bring the food to him so he can partake of it.

Why did Isaac ask Esau to bring him food before he would bless him? Didn't his wife Rebecca prepare food for him daily? And if he wanted his son to perform the Mitzvah of honoring his father, why did he make this request of him at this time and not before?

In truth, Esau did hunt and feed his father regularly. Indeed, the reason the Torah gives for Isaac's love for Esau is that Esau provided him with the food he hunted.

Commentators grapple with this fact. It is hard to imagine that Isaac of all people would be blinded by the food he received from Esau. However, the simple explanation is that

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Isaac would ask Esau to use the food he procured by hunting for the Mitzvah of honoring his father. In that way, Isaac was able to transform the art of hunting – not a very spiritual pursuit – into a Mitzvah.

By doing so Isaac thought Esau's character would be refined and he would become more spiritual.

If Esau would have simply taken food already prepared it would not have been as great a Mitzvah because it would have lacked the effort that he was able to expend by hunting for food. And it is the act of the Mitzvah combined with effort and sacrifice that endows it with the ability to change a person's character. And since Isaac knew that Esau's character was far from being refined he cherished the opportunity to get Esau to go to great lengths to do a Mitzvah.

Having said all this, the issue raised earlier is that much more problematic. Why does the Torah make a big fuss about the fact that Isaac asked Esau to provide him with food before he would give him his blessings? Wasn't this routine for Esau?

Vessel for Blessings: Mitzvos

The answer lies in the fact that in order for a blessing to be effective it must be associated with a Mitzvah.

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Chassidic thought explains that a blessing is like rain, without which the crops will not grow. Nevertheless, in order for the rain to do its job, one must first cultivate the earth, by plowing it. Similarly, in order for Isaac's blessing to have produced positive results, Esau had to do a special Mitzvah. That Mitzvah would serve as the cultivation of his personality that would make him receptive to the positive energies that were generated by the blessings.

Based on this analysis one can raise a simple question. How did Jacob receive the blessings when he impersonated his brother Esau? After all, he did not go out and hunt for the food. Rather his mother was the one who prepared it for him to take to his father before Esau would return. How then could Jacob be receptive to his father's blessings as was Esau, considering the fact that he did not really expend much effort in providing his with the food?

Jacob's Preparations

One could perhaps suggest two answers:

First, Jacob, in fact, did not need as much cultivation to make him receptive to Isaac's blessings. Jacob had been devoting his entire life to self-refinement and spiritual growth. For him the mere act of the Mitzvah sufficed to make him eligible for the blessings.

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Second, Jacob did in fact expend as much energy as his brother Esau in the pursuit of the Mitzvah of honoring his parents. Indeed, as we shall see, his efforts represented far more of a sacrifice than Esau's hunting.

Whereas Esau was simply doing what came natural to him, hunting, Jacob went against his nature of honesty to deceive his father at the behest of his mother. Rebecca commanded him to take the blessings, knowing that Isaac would never have given them to Esau had he known the truth about his sale of his birthright to Jacob. Nevertheless, it was a most difficult thing for Jacob to do something that was so contrary to his nature. Jacob is described in the Torah as an "*ish tam*," which implies he was a man of integrity and sincerity. It was the ultimate sacrifice to listen to his mother and perform an act of deception, albeit for a noble cause.

Moreover, for a righteous person, bending one's principles for the greater good is far more painful than a physical sacrifice. And it was this sacrifice that made Jacob worthy of all the blessings he received from his father.

Of all the blessings that have ever been showered upon us from the beginning of our existence is the blessing and promise of Moshiach; a time of universal peace, prosperity, goodness, and above all, the revelation of the divine throughout the world.

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Sacrificing for Moshiach

But, all blessings require cultivation. And there is no greater cultivation than the thousands of years the Jewish people have sacrificed life and limb for their observance of Judaism.

Of all the sacrifices we can make to make us worthy of the Messianic blessing it is the sacrifice that involves changing our habits for the purpose of helping another or going against our nature in the fulfillment of any Mitzvah.

Needless to stress, that we, as a people, have sufficiently cultivated ourselves throughout our long and arduous existence to deserve the final Redemption. We are ready for Moshiach. However, the more we cultivate ourselves through the observance of all the Mitzvos three things will happen:

- (a) The more we will hasten the coming of Moshiach,
- (b) The easier the process of Redemption will be; it will be a smoother transition from exile.
- (c) The more prepared we will be to internalize all the good that we will experience in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE HANDS OF ESAU

We are currently living in an age where most countries in the world are supportive to one degree or another of Jewish life and observance.

Even the former Soviet Empire that sought to extinguish every trace of the light of Judaism has been transformed into a society that warmly supports Jewish life in all of its manifestations.

This radical transformation of “Esau” was what our patriarch Isaac had in mind when he sought to bless Esau.

It is also a taste of what is to come with the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the future Redemption.

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

THE HANDS OF ESAU

The Voice of Jacob; the Hands of Esau.

The Torah relates how Rebecca overheard how Isaac asked Esau to bring him some venison so that he could bless him before his death. Rebecca then ordered Jacob to dress himself in Esau's hairy clothing and present himself as his brother in order to get these blessings. When Isaac, whose vision was impaired, heard Jacob's voice and then felt his hands, he exclaimed: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

These immortal words have been understood by our Sages as a description of the power of the Jewish nation versus its adversaries. While our adversaries rely on their hands, i.e., brute force, the Jewish nation has, historically, resorted to using their voices in prayer and Torah study.

After Jacob left with the blessings, Esau arrived and demanded that he too be given a blessing. Isaac's response was that "You will live by the sword." Here, Isaac does not

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use the metaphor, “the hands are the hands of Esau,” but states quite explicitly that he will live by the sword.

We should understand why prior to Jacob’s receiving of the blessings, Isaac used the metaphor of “the hands of Esau,” but subsequently, upon discovering Jacob’s ruse, he referred to Esau’s sword explicitly? Why didn’t Isaac use the metaphor then as well?

To answer this question we ought to reflect on the entire story of how Esau was so loved by Isaac. How could it be that Isaac preferred Esau, the gruff and uncouth outdoorsman, to the soft-spoken, reverent student, Jacob? How could Isaac have been so misled by Esau? To simply suggest that a man, the caliber of Isaac, could be duped by his own son is incredulous.

Isaac Sees Utopian World Partnership of Jacob and Esau

One answer is that Isaac foresaw a utopian world that would involve a holy partnership between Jacob and Esau. While Jacob would be better suited for Torah scholarship, meditation and in general, the more spiritual pursuits, it was Esau that would eventually provide the support system—the “hands”—for Jacob’s endeavors.

Indeed, Kabbalah teaches us that one can discover even greater treasures of G-dly energy in the more mundane

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aspects of life. These treasures, however, can only be accessed when one uses the material matters to facilitate Torah study and other spiritual pursuits.

This partnership—which will become a reality in the future Messianic Age, as has been prophesied in the Torah—was the ideal that Isaac hoped would have become reality millennia before the Messianic Age.

By showing love and affection for Esau, and by preferring to give him his special blessings, Isaac hoped to actualize Esau's role as a faithful partner to Jacob.

We can now appreciate the deeper meaning of the metaphor of the “Hands of Esau,” that Isaac originally employed. When he heard Jacob's gentle and refined voice combined with his hairy and rough hands, he felt vindicated. This synthesis was a confirmation of Isaac's dream that the two could and would live together and complement one another.

However, that utopian vision did not materialize the way Isaac envisioned it. Isaac subsequently realized that Esau was not suitable for the role of supporter and partner; Esau did not appreciate his own spiritual potential. He was then compelled to recast his prophecy concerning Esau, that his hands would not be supportive but antagonistic and violent. Tragically, Jews would be forced to express their own spirituality not with the help of the nations of the

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world but through adversity.

In the present day and age, Esau's legacy was taken over by Western Civilization. At first, the Greeks and Romans—who bequeathed to us Western culture—served as adversaries. They employed every tactic available to them to crush us and to deter us from our Torah mission. The “hands of Esau” were brutal and destructive.

Isaac's Vision Materializing

But in the end, Isaac's original vision will certainly come true. Indeed, we are already witnessing the beginning of that process. We are currently living in an age where most countries in the world do not stand in our way and certainly do not impose other religions on us. Moreover, they are supportive to one degree or another of Jewish life and observance. Even the former Soviet Empire that sought to extinguish every trace of the light of Judaism has been transformed into a society that warmly supports Jewish life in all of its manifestations.

This radical transformation of “Esau” was what our patriarch Isaac had in mind when he sought to bless Esau. It is also a taste of what is to come with the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the future Redemption that we have been praying for close to 2,000 years. Now is surely the time to accentuate the other side of the equation, the

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“Voice of Jacob” with greater emphasis on Torah study, specifically the teachings of Torah that deal with the future Redemption.

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE VOICE OF JACOB AND THE HANDS OF ESAU

**A Jew cannot be passive. Judaism is not a spectator sport.
One must be actively engaged in one's Jewish life.**

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE VOICE OF JACOB AND THE HANDS OF ESAU

Jewish Strength: The Voice of Jacob

Rebecca overhears her husband Isaac tell their son Esau that he wants to bless him before he dies. She then directs Jacob to get the blessings by wearing Esau's furs so that if his father—who could not see—would try to touch him, he would think it was the hairy Esau that he was blessing.

When Jacob addresses his father Isaac, Isaac immediately detects that something is strange. It was the voice of Jacob, not Esau. So he asks him to approach so that he can feel him. And when he feels the hairy texture of the fur, Isaac exclaims: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, and the hands are the hands of Esau."

This expression has been used by our Sages to describe the different powers that were possessed by the descendants of Esau (specifically the Romans) and the descendants of Jacob (the Jewish nation):

While other nations of the earth expressed their strength by the use of their hands and arms, the strength of the

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Jewish people lies in their voice, in their prayers and study of Torah.

The Role of Intent Versus Action

There is another interesting interpretation that has been given by one of the early Chassidic masters, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polna'ah, a leading disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov. This interpretation concerns the necessity of having the right intentions while performing a mitzvah.

According to Jewish law, as codified by the great Maimonides, if one were to hear the sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, but not have in mind to fulfill a religious obligation, they would not have fulfilled their obligation. For example, if one were to hear the sounds of the shofar as he was passing by a synagogue, but did not think of fulfilling his obligation at that time, they do need to hear the shofar later.

There is a discrepancy, however, in this matter, for Maimonides himself rules that if one were to eat Matzah on Passover without the intention of fulfilling his religious obligation, he would not have to repeat the eating of Matzah, for he has fulfilled his religious duty. The intent is not crucial to the fulfillment of the Mitzvah.

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So which is it? Why is it that for the Mitzvah of Shofar one must have the intent, whereas for the mitzvah of Matzah the intent is not imperative?

One answer given by one of Maimonides' earliest commentators is that hearing a sound is a passive function, whereas eating is active. In order to make a Mitzvah out of hearing, that takes no physical effort, one needs to expend the mental effort, in order to make the passive act of hearing shofar an active Mitzvah.

By contrast, eating Matzah is an active performance. Hence there is no need to have intent to discharge one's obligation. The act itself has intrinsic value. To be sure, ideally, one should have both physical and mental effort in doing a Mitzvah, nevertheless, in the event that it was lacking, one still has accomplished something just with one's action.

This is how Rabbi Yaakov Yosef interprets the words of Isaac: "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau":

When it comes to a Mitzvah that involves hearing a sound (the Hebrew word for voice "kol" also means sound), it must be infused with the spirit of Jacob. One must have the proper intent. If, however, it is a Mitzvah that involves action, then even if it were the "hands of (the non-

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spiritual) Esau”; an act that is devoid of feeling, it is nonetheless a Mitzvah.

Passivity is Passé

There is a dual lesson in the above:

One the one hand, we derive from this law, that a Jew cannot be passive. Judaism is not a spectator sport. One must be actively engaged in one’s Jewish life.

On the other hand, we should not think that if we do not perform the Mitzvah with all of our physical and mental faculties that it may not pay to start. Any physical involvement with a Mitzvah, even if it lacks the infusion of the ideal mental, emotional and spiritual dimension, is nonetheless a bona fide Mitzvah.

Cascade of Cataclysmic Events

The above has special application to the time in which we live.

We are witness to an unprecedented avalanche of events of cataclysmic proportions. And more importantly, perhaps, we are now capable of hearing about these events—that eluded us in the past—due to the media explosion that bring all these events to our attention.

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And although we have no way of knowing why the tragic events are happening, our tradition teaches us to look at every event and ask: what? What do these events teach us? And the answer provided by our tradition is that these events are G-d's "shofar," G-d's way of awakening and jolting us, so that we realize that Moshiach is on his way and it is high time for us to be part of the process of Redemption. But, we cannot just passively allow the reverberations of the world's upheavals merely enter our consciousness; we must make a special effort to hear and internalize this wake-up call.

Just Do it!

And at the same time, we must also accentuate the "hands of Esau" in the performance of more acts of goodness and kindness. Don't worry about your motives and feelings when a decision has to be made to do a Mitzvah; just do it. The feelings will come later, but the opportunity to do that one act of kindness—that might be the one act needed to change the balance of the entire world that will bring about its salvation—will be lost.

Don't be concerned if people tell you "you are a hypocrite" because you did a Mitzvah, and you're still no better than Esau. For it is this Mitzvah that might transform you into a Jacob, and make you receptive to the sound of the Great

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Shofar that will usher in the age when our feelings and actions will be well integrated—the voice and hands will both be those of Jacob.

ESSAY NINETEEN

REFLECTIONS

Even when we are justified in our anger against another,
we must never allow that anger to seethe in us.

The anger should be directed into a course of action how
to correct the mistakes of the other, but never should the
anger be allowed to remain in our conscious and even
subconscious mind.

By expunging any and every trace of hatred towards our
brothers and sisters, we will also make it easier to have
them get rid of their negative energy. This will then have a
ripple effect on the entire world.

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ESSAY NINETEEN

REFLECTIONS

Mutual Feelings

Jacob, at the behest of his mother, put on a disguise, and misrepresented himself to his father Isaac, who wanted to bless Esau before his death. Instead, he gave the blessings to Jacob, thinking he was really Esau.

Understandably, Esau was upset at having been cheated out of the blessings that he imagined belonged to him. But Esau was not just upset; he plotted to murder his brother Jacob.

When Rebecca discovered how Jacob's life was in danger, she sent him away to her brother Laban.

Rebecca advised Jacob to stay with Laban: "until your brother's fury turn away; until your brother's anger turn away from you, and he forget that which you have done to him."

Commentators wonder why Rebecca repeated the words "until your brother's anger turn away from you"?

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One answer is that just as Esau hated Jacob, Jacob also harbored negative feelings towards Esau. And, indeed, Jacob's feelings were justified in light of Esau's blatant rejection of all the moral teachings for which his parents and grandparents stood.

And while Esau's hatred was understandable it was unjustified. Jacob had indeed purchased the "birthright" which meant that he was legally the rightfully Isaac's sole heir. Esau had rejected all that being the first born son stood for. The distress he caused his parents caused Jacob to harbor negative feelings towards Esau.

So when Rebecca told Jacob to go to her brother Laban, her motive was twofold: First she wanted him to be far from Esau, lest he carry out his evil designs against Jacob.

But Rebecca also wanted to heal Jacob's negativity towards Esau. The distance between Jacob and Esau would give them both time to "chill out" and allow their feelings to subside.

His Anger will Subside when Yours Does

There was still a problem. Granted, the distance between them would heal the wounds caused by Esau's behavior, but there is another type of hatred that is generated by the negative feelings that Esau harbored against him. As the

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wisest of all men declared, "As water reflects the image of a face, so the heart of man corresponds to the heart of his fellow man" (Proverbs 27:19). This suggests that when a person has negative feelings towards another, that individual will likewise experience negative feelings towards the other.

By taking leave of Esau, Rebecca advised Jacob to flee to Laban and stay there until Esau's fury would cease.

But, Jacob asked his mother: "How will I know that Esau's anger has subsided?"

His mother told him: "When the anger **you** carry will depart from you, then you can be sure that your brother Esau has forgotten what you did to him, and no longer has animosity against you." As long as you have not expunged the negative feelings from your system, it will be reflected in Esau's attitude towards you. Once you purify your heart, Esau's heart will also soften.

Don't Let the Anger Seeth

The Talmud relates that the reason we are in exile is because of the lack of love for our fellow Jew. The negative energy that is generated by the hatred and animosity that we see directed against one another prevents us from getting out of exile into a world of peace and holiness.

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The way to change this is to begin with ourselves. Even if we were justified in our anger against another, we must never allow that anger to seethe in us. The anger should be directed into a course of action how to correct the mistakes of the other, but never should the anger be allowed to remain in our conscious and even subconscious mind.

By expunging any and every trace of hatred towards our brothers and sisters, we will also make it easier to have them get rid of their negative energy. This will then have a ripple effect on the entire world.

This doesn't mean that we should never take strong action to defend ourselves, change the other person, etc. when it is possible to do so. And we are not talking about the vile anti-Semites that threaten the existence of the Jewish people. It does mean that when we've exhausted all other avenues—or alongside them—to change the attitudes of others towards us, we ought to cleanse ourselves of those negative feelings.

Putting the above in a more positive light:

The positive energy that we generate by purging ourselves of negative thoughts about others, will prepare us for the Redemption, by making our hearts, minds and souls receptive to the revelation of G-dly light in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY TWENTY

REFLECTIONS 2

The two periods of exile and Redemption are expressive of the two modes of G-d's relationship with us.

In exile G-d appears distant and it instills a feeling of G-d having abandoned us.

In the days of the Holy Temple old as well as when Moshiach will come, we will experience G-d's love and closeness to us.

However, when we stubbornly "ignore" G-d's aloofness and detachment from us, and insist on getting closer to Him with love, that "forces" G-d, so to speak, to reciprocate His love for us and bring us Moshiach and the final Redemption

ESSAY TWENTY

REFLECTIONS 2

Repetition

After Esau discovered the ruse that his brother Jacob used to take his father Isaac's blessings that were intended for Esau, he plotted to kill him. Rebecca summoned her son Jacob and informed him that Esau was plotting to kill him. She then advised her son to flee to her brother Laban and dwell there until his brother's wrath will subside.

Rebecca then repeats herself. After saying that he should "live with him for a few days until your brother's anger will calm down," she then says to Jacob, "Until your brother's anger against you has calmed down, and he forgets what you did to him."

Commentators wonder why Rebecca had to restate the point of staying away until his brother's anger subsides.

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Second, they ask, why does she first use the weaker term for anger “*chamas*” and then switches to the stronger word “*af*”

Third, why does Rebecca first say “until your brother’s wrath will subside,” and then, in the next verse, she adds the words “against you?”

Two Forms of Anger

The answer, based on the Chassidic work *Panim Yafos*, is that there are two types of anger:

One type of anger and hatred is generated by actions that others may take that are provocative. For example, if someone insults you or hurts you, it is natural to react with anger towards that individual.

The second form of anger and hatred is the reciprocal form of anger and hatred. When a person senses that there is hostility directed towards him, it is natural to reflect that hatred back to the first person. King Solomon alluded to this reciprocal hatred in his Book of Proverbs: “As in water, face answers to face, so is the heart of a man to a man.” Just as you look at your reflection in the water, so does the reflection look back at you.”

And it was this second type of hatred that Rebecca was addressing in her second statement. Rather than translating

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it as “Until your brother’s anger against you has calmed down,” the original Hebrew text allows for the following novel translation: “Until your brother’s anger that comes from you has calmed down.” She was referring to the hatred that Esau had for Jacob that originated in Jacob’s hatred for him.

Reciprocal anger is much stronger than the anger generated by a one-time hostile action. Reflected hatred is constantly nourished and nurtured by the other person’s hatred that remains constant.

Thus when referring to this reflected hatred, Rebecca uses the stronger term “*af*,” suggesting that this anger was a far more potent one; one that is fed by the continuous flow of negative energy.

Rebecca, however, knew that Jacob’s hatred for Esau was based on Esau’s reprehensible immoral behavior. Out of sight is out of mind. With the absence of Esau, Jacob’s hatred for him will wane, and therefore, Esau’s reciprocal hostility to Jacob will also decline.

Two Ways of Generating Positive Energy Towards us

What is true in the world of negativity is certainly true with regard to positive feelings. There are two parallel ways of getting someone to have positive feelings for us. One is

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to do good for others. But a far more potent generator of positive energy from another is to feel love for the other. The more positive energy we direct at the other, the more they will reflect that love back to us.

The same is true in our relationship with G-d. There are two general ways of relating to G-d. One is through fear and awe and the other is through love. And while both are positive and necessary in our relationship with Him, there is a distinct advantage to the approach of love. Fear implies a gulf between the two entities, while love suggests the existence of a bridge between the two.

If we relate to G-d exclusively with fear, thereby creating a gulf between ourselves and G-d, then G-d relates to us in that same fashion. He will appear distant and aloof. When we serve Him with love and feel close to Him, we will then experience G-d's reciprocal love for and closeness to us.

Parallel to Period of Exile and Redemption

The two periods of exile and Redemption are expressive of the two modes of G-d's relationship with us. In exile G-d appears distant and it instills a feeling of G-d having abandoned us. In the days of the Holy Temple old as well as when Moshiach will come, we will experience G-d's love and closeness to us. However, when we stubbornly "ignore" G-d's aloofness and detachment from us, and insist on

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getting closer to Him with love, that “forces” G-d, so to speak, to reciprocate His love for us and bring us Moshiach and the final Redemption.

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ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

MOTHER OF JACOB AND ESAU: WHAT'S THE LESSON?

**There are only two acceptable methods of dealing with
recalcitrant children:**

**Either shower and smother them with love and warmth, or
in extreme situations employ tough love.**

To do neither is unacceptable in virtually all situations.

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ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

MOTHER OF JACOB AND ESAU: WHAT'S THE LESSON?

“...the Mother of Jacob and Esau.”

Isaac summons his son Esau and offers to give him his blessings before he dies. Isaac asks his son Esau to go out and hunt and prepare a gourmet meal for him before he would bestow these special Divine blessings on him. Rebecca overhears the conversation and tells her son Jacob to pose as Esau and get the blessings instead. Jacob successfully pulls off this “ruse” and receives his father’s blessings. When Esau discovers how Jacob wrested the blessings from him he vowed to kill him.

Rebecca, meanwhile, advises Jacob to flee to her brother Laban and stay there until Esau’s wrath would subside. Rebecca fears that if Jacob would stay she would lose both of them in one day.

Rebecca then tells her husband that she could not countenance the idea that Jacob would marry one of the local girls. She therefore suggests to Isaac that Jacob should

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go to Padan Aram to find a suitable wife for himself. Isaac then summons Jacob and tells him to go to Padan Aram and marry one of the daughters of Laban, Rebecca's brother.

The Torah then continues: "And Isaac sent Jacob, and he went to Padan Aram to Laban the son of Besuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Esau."

Rashi, in a rare comment, observes: "I do not know what this—information that Rebecca was the mother of Jacob and Esau—teaches us."

Rashi is obviously puzzled at the need for the Torah here to identify Rebecca as the mother of Jacob and Esau. Don't we already know that she was their mother? After all, the entire parsha is about: Rebecca's difficult pregnancy with them, how she was told by G-d that she would have twins, her giving birth to these children, their upbringing and her relationship with them. In fact, there is no other story in the Torah of a mother that provides so many details concerning the relationship of a mother with her sons as it does here. How could the reader of the Torah not know that Rebecca was the mother of Jacob and Esau?

Rashi therefore concedes that he does not know what message this was meant to convey.

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Rashi's Rejection of Explanation

One might suggest the following explanation, which, can answer Rashi's question, but will generate another question, as to why Rashi did not give this explanation.

When one reflects on the way Rebecca goes out of her way to help Jacob receive Isaac's powerful blessings, knowing how upset Esau would be, one might have been justified in concluding that though she was the biological mother of the two of them, Rebecca was, in fact, more Jacob's mother in the nurturing sense of motherhood, than she was Esau's.

Indeed, the Torah says so much in the beginning of this week's parsha: "Isaac loved Esau... and Rebecca loved Jacob."

The difference between her attitude towards Jacob and Esau is once more dramatically illustrated in the last narrative of this parsha where she asks Jacob to flee to her brother. In addition to her concern about his safety she is also concerned that he not marry any of the local women, but should instead find a more suitable match with one of her brother Laban's daughters. Why did Rebecca not ask Esau to go there to marry one of her brother's daughters? This again appears to underscore her preference for Jacob over Esau.

To dispel this notion that Rebecca cared less for Esau, the Torah states empathically—here, in the very last occurrence of Rebecca in the Torah—that she was indeed

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the mother of both Jacob and Esau. Despite the appearance of her preference for Jacob, she was equally concerned for the well-being of her son Esau and was his mother no less than she was Jacob's mother.

However, this raises two questions:

First, if this explanation is valid, why did Rashi not provide it? Why couldn't Rashi state simply that the Torah wanted to tell us that despite the appearance of Rebecca playing favorites and preferring Jacob over Esau, she was truly the mother of both, she loved them both?

Second, if it is true that Rebecca loved them both equally, why did she display far more love and concern for Jacob than for Esau?

The Only Way Esau could be Helped

The answer to the second question is that the reason she demonstrated more affection for Jacob was due to the unique circumstances that prevailed then:

From the Torah's narrative—especially as it is illuminated by the Oral tradition—it becomes evident that the only way Esau could be helped to overcome his deficit was tragically not through love and affection. Isaac attempted to use the approach of love for his son Esau and did not succeed in changing him. Esau was incorrigible. The more

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Isaac tried to show how much he loved him, the more Esau deceived his father and led a life of violence, immorality and contempt for the legacy of Abraham and Isaac, even as he was deceiving his father and trying to convince him that he was the pious obedient son. Esau loudly and defiantly proclaimed as much when he disgraced the birthright (read: the legacy of Abraham and Isaac) and sold it for a mere pot of lentils.

It gets worse. Esau was not only a threat to Jacob, but he was a threat to the entire world. If Jacob and the legacy he followed would have been destroyed by Esau, there would never be a Jewish nation, and the Torah would not have been given. Thus, the entire world's purpose and *raison d'être* would have been undermined, for we are told that the only reason G-d created the world was for the purpose of Torah and Israel. Absent those two, our Sages declare, the world would revert to nothingness.

No Tough Love

To be sure, there is another approach to raising children. That is tough love. But even that was not a viable option in Esau's case. We also do not find that Isaac or Rebecca used "tough love" on Esau. That too was not an alternative, Rebecca had to face the bitter reality that she had an incorrigible child who was—at that time not ready to be

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helped. Esau could not be reached and rehabilitated. She had no choice but to focus all of her attention on Jacob and saving him from Esau, while hoping and praying that someday Esau would be able to be helped.

We can now understand why Rashi states, “I don’t know what this teaches us.”

Unique Parental Challenge

Rashi may have known that the Torah wishes to emphasize that Rebecca loved both of her sons despite the appearance to the contrary. Yet Rashi states, I don’t know what this could teach us, because this was such an aberration it cannot serve as a model for future parents who have a recalcitrant child.

There are only two acceptable methods of dealing with recalcitrant children in virtually all situations; either shower and smother them with love and warmth or in extreme situations one must employ tough love. To do neither is unacceptable in virtually all situations. Rashi warns us in this one isolated instance were none of those methods worked not to learn lessons from Rebecca’s approach to parenting. Her situation was so isolated that it can hardly ever be applicable.

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Thus the lesson from this aberrant situation is that we should avoid learning a lesson from it. Our parenting should be based exclusively on love, even if it is occasionally “tough” love.

In the Messianic Age, we are told; Esau will eventually come around and be reconciled with Jacob. At that time we will see how Rebecca was truly concerned with both of her children even though she could not show that love and concern at that time. For thousands of years Rebecca’s love was concealed because the Esau’s of the world were not ready for it. We are now standing on the threshold of the Messianic Era when all nations will serve G-d as one and true universal peace and harmony will prevail.

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ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

MOTHER OF JACOB AND ESAU: “I DON’T KNOW” IS THE LESSON!

If we understood the dynamic of exile we would make peace with it and would not demand of G-d and of ourselves to bring an end to the struggle. We would be blinded by all the positive forces we generate because of the struggle.

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ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

MOTHER OF JACOB AND ESAU: “I DON’T KNOW” IS THE LESSON!

Rebecca: The Mother of Jacob and Esau

Isaac summons his son Esau and offers to give him his blessings before he dies. Isaac asks his son Esau to go out and hunt and prepare a gourmet meal for him before he would bestow these special Divine blessings on him. Rebecca overhears the conversation and tells her son Jacob to pose as Esau and get the blessings instead. When Esau discovers how Jacob wrested the blessings from him he vowed to kill him.

Rebecca, meanwhile, advises Jacob to flee to her brother Laban and stay there until Esau’s wrath would subside. Isaac, too, tells Jacob to go to Padan Aram and marry one of the daughters of Laban, Rebecca’s brother.

The Torah then continues: “And Isaac sent Jacob, and he went to Padan Aram to Laban the son of Betuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebecca, **the mother of Jacob and Esau.**”

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Rashi, in a rare comment, observes: “I do not know what this—information that Rebecca was the mother of Jacob and Esau—teaches us.”

Rashi is obviously puzzled at the need for the Torah here to identify Rebecca as the mother of Jacob and Esau. Don't we already know that she was their mother? Rashi therefore concedes that he does not know what message this was meant to convey. (See preceding essay for a lesson in child raising this Rashi can provide).

The Wine of Torah

Rashi, we are told, contains not only the simple, straightforward level of interpretation known as *p'shat*. Embedded in his commentary one can find deeper spiritual and mystical meanings to the text. This has been referred to as “the wine of Torah.” It is the dimension of Torah that brings joy and reveals the secrets, as the Talmud states: “Enter the wine, out emerge the secrets.”

What secret message do the words “I don't know what this teaches us” convey?

Foreshadowing Jewish History

This entire story, from the pregnancy of Rebecca until the moment Jacob had to flee the wrath of his brother Esau, a

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dynamic of struggle and conflict ensued, which foreshadowed all of Jewish history. From that moment onwards, the Jewish people were in a perennial conflict with the descendants and heirs of Esau who sought to destroy us. This was particularly true in the days of Galus-exile, when Esau totally dominated the Jewish people, particularly from the destruction of the Second Temple onwards.

There is a reason for this situation. By Jacob (read: the Jewish nation) living within the territory and under the domination of Esau, Jacob has the capacity and indeed the mission to refine Esau, and thereby elevate the world, paving the way for Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

This entire process is indeed the very *raison d'être* of creation. G-d wanted a dwelling place in the physical world and embedded His most potent Divine sparks of energy within the physical world and particularly within the world of Esau.

From this vantage point, the struggle between Jacob and Esau sounds quite understandable; it is the process that leads to the world reaching its state of perfection and redemption. This notion that adversity is a part of life and actually enables us to fulfill our very reason for existence we accept at face value.

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Beyond Understanding

In truth, the entire concept is beyond understanding. Why does G-d want us to struggle and suffer? Couldn't He accomplish His goal of making the world a G-dly place without all the pain?

Moreover, the underlying motive of making this world into a dwelling place for Him is beyond understanding. Why does He need a dwelling place in a physical world? Would G-d have lacked anything if He had not created our world?

All this points to the fact that G-d is inscrutable and so too are His motives for creation. And the attendant suffering and struggle that goes along with life, as well, are beyond understanding. Not only are G-d's reasons beyond our understanding; they are inherently beyond logic.

The Alter Rebbe (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad movement) once focused on the words of the Midrash that state, "G-d desired a dwelling place in the lowest precincts": "One cannot question a desire." What the Alter Rebbe was saying is that while we know **what** G-d's objective was in creation, we cannot ever know the **why**. Creation is above and beyond human reasoning.

And if creation is beyond our understanding, then the need to have this perennial struggle with Esau is totally beyond our ability to comprehend.

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The mission of Jacob to refine Esau and bring the world to its intended purpose ends with the coming of Moshiach and the Final Redemption. At that time Jacob and Esau will be reconciled. Then we will see that, contrary to appearances, Rebecca was indeed equally the mother of Jacob and Esau. This entire struggle that began with Jacob and Esau's wrestling in Rebecca's womb, through Jacob's appropriation of the blessings was intended to yield their rapprochement in the Messianic Age.

We can only conclude that this entire saga is beyond our understanding; it transcends logic.

Moshiach Beyond Understanding

Indeed, this is what our Sages meant to tell us when they stated that Moshiach comes when we are distracted. The Alter Rebbe explains that this actually means that the entire Messianic dynamic is above and beyond our understanding. As much as we can fathom there is always something about Moshiach that will remain unfathomable.

This then is the hidden message of Rashi when he comments on the word "the mother of Jacob and Esau," and says "I don't know what this teaches us." With these words, Rashi hints to the fact that the entire story is beyond understanding.

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The Torah's statement that she was the mother of both Jacob and Esau intimates to the fact that despite Rebecca's efforts to get the blessings for Jacob, she was truly the mother of both Jacob and Esau; she loved them both. However, that reality will only become apparent after thousands of years of struggle until the Messianic Age.

[It is interesting to note that the words "the mother of Jacob and Esau" numerically add up to 615. This can read: *b'taryag*, which means "with 613". The hint here is when will we see how Rebecca is truly the mother of Jacob and Esau? When we will have fulfilled the 613 commandments, most of which we will be able to perform in the Messianic Age.]

This Rashi says is beyond our understanding just as the entire Messianic process transcends knowledge.

The knowledge that the entire process of exile and struggle is beyond understanding compels us to fight Galus by finishing the mission to bring about the Redemption. If we understood the dynamic of exile we would make peace with it and would not demand of G-d and of ourselves to bring an end to the struggle. We would be blinded by all the positive forces we generate because of the struggle.

Knowing that Moshiach is beyond understanding, however, does not diminish our appreciation for it; it actually deepens it. To transcend knowledge is not incompatible

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with knowledge. On the contrary. The Rebbe explained how the way to get out of exile is to study the teachings of the Torah concerning Moshiach and Redemption. We must saturate our mind with this subject and then recognize that the entire Messianic drama is infinitely more sublime than our finite minds can grasp.