

Torah is gleaned, was written at a time of utter personal and communal devastation, after the *Rebbe* had lost most of his family. Indeed, it is the last work of *Chassidic* origin in Poland. The period of the Holocaust was not conducive to creative thought, certainly not religious thought which required deep thinking and lucid perception. While this tragic era has engendered a voluminous body of religious and philosophical writing, it was all generated in hindsight following the war. It was possible to look back and reflect – and then write. Thus, the *Eish Kodesh* is an extraordinary piece of work – which I use whenever pertinent. Not only is it an unparalleled example of personal achievement, it is a singular testament to the ability of the Jews to think cogently even during moments of the most difficult travail. His words speak to us from amidst the heart of darkness itself. Now for the *dvar Torah*.

The *Navi Yeshayah* (28:13) says: *U'va'u ha'ovdim b'eret Ashur, v'ha'nidachim b'eret Mitzrayim*. "They will come, those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those who are outcast in the land of Egypt." The *Rebbe* explains that there are people who are really "lost," and there are those who are simply "outcast." The outcast person has merely been exiled from one location to another place, but he can still be seen and recognized. A person who is lost, however, is neither visible nor recognizable.

In his homily to *Parashas Toldos* (1940), the *Rebbe* applies the similes of "lost" and "outcast" to the psychic disintegration of the Ghetto Jews. "For now, the troubles are greatly increasing," the *Rebbe* says "Indeed, they are shearing the beards of Jews, so that they cannot be recognized by their external appearance. Furthermore, due to the many persecutions and unbearable, unimaginable torments, people even lose their inner identities. This process can digress so far that he loses himself (*ehr farlitzich*) and no longer recognizes himself. He no longer recalls his self-image as it was a year ago, on *Shabbos*, or even a weekday before prayer, during prayer and other such times. Now he is crushed and trampled, so much that he cannot discern if he is a Jew, a human being, or rather an animal who does not have the capacity for feeling. He is then 'lost' in the Scriptural sense."

The *Rebbe* concludes with a message of hope. In the *Talmud Kiddushin*, *Chazal* state, *Baal aveidah machzir al aveidaso*, "The loser (one who has lost an article) must return to search for his lost article." This is because a truly lost article cannot be seen nor recognized and so it is the owner who must go around looking for it in order to find it, to lift it up and bring it back to him. Thus, bearing in mind that *Klal Yisrael* is Hashem's "lost article" and we are His *aveidah*, it is Hashem Who is in search of His people. He will find us. He will give us everything good, returning to Him, redeem us, rescue our bodies and souls with great mercy.

This is the underlying (homiletic rendering) meaning of *Yitzchak's brachah* – *yitein v'yachzor v'yitein*. Hashem will give not only when the Jew is visible and recognizable (*yitein*), but also when he is lost, where he is neither recognizable nor visible as a Jew. At such times, Hashem will return (*yachzor v'yitein*) and give again. The Owner of the lost object will return to search for us and find us – and then bless us with His beneficence.

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Va'ani Tefillah

אתה חונן לאדם דעת. Atah chonein l'Adam daas. You favor man with knowledge.

This is the first of the weekday blessings, since the previous three *brachos* consist solely of gratitude and praise. Unlike the remainder of the weekday *brachos*, this one begins with a declaration: *V'atah*, "And You," rather than open with a request, as do the other blessings. We begin, "You favor man with knowledge," and only afterwards do we request that Hashem favor us with this knowledge. The commentators explain that all of the other needs of men are easily recognized. Therefore, we need not prepare our supplication with any declaration. (We need not begin our prayer for forgiveness of sin with a declaration, "You," since it is obvious that only Hashem forgives sin.) *Daas*, however, which denotes knowledge in the sense of consciousness and awareness, might be overlooked by man as being a gift from Hashem, considering it an inalienable and inseparable part of his personality which belongs to him as a person. Thus, to "set things straight," we begin with the acknowledgement that *daas* is a gift from Hashem.

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Parashas Toldos תשע"ג פרשת תולדות

TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

ויצא הראשון אדמוני... ויקראו שמו עשו. ואחרי כן יצא אחיו וידו אחוז בעקב עשו ויקרא שמו יעקב
The first one emerged red... so they named him Eisav. After that, his brother emerged with his hand grasping onto the heel of Eisav so he called his name Yaakov. (25: 25,26)

Is there an end to the misery that has been inflicted upon us by the descendants of Eisav? While it appears that in the present era our primary national adversity comes from the minions of Yishmael, we may never forget the terror and persecution that have been orchestrated against us throughout history by Eisav's children, particularly those who maintain the strong tendencies of Amalek. **Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, zl**, observes that, even when Eisav (or his descendants) exhibit themselves as being "first" and stronger, Yaakov still grasps his heel. This implies that Eisav's rule has limits. Yaakov will hold on for dear life, but he will hold on and not permit Eisav to go beyond what is Heavenly-permitted. It is very much like a dog that is chained to a post. The dog will run and growl, bark and paw at anything in his reach, but it will never get beyond what is allowed by the length of the chain.

Eisav's domination over Yaakov, his iron anti-Semitic grip, will only go so far. Eisav has limits. He cannot break the chain. I think that there is one stipulation to this: we must act like Yaakov. Yaakov *Avinu* is symbolized by his affinity to Torah and *emes*, truth. This is our Patriarch's persona: Torah study and a strong adherence to integrity, an abhorrence of any semblance of falsehood. The mantle of being called Yaakov's descendants is accompanied by the responsibility of living up to this honor. A chain that is "rusted" will not have the power to contain the dog.

ויאהב יצחק את עשו
Yitzchak loved Eisav. (25:28)

Yitzchak *Avinu* loved his son, Eisav, despite his nefarious ways. The **Satmar Rav, zl**, once commented about this. It happened that a student in *Yeshiva Torah V'Yirah* of Satmar/Williamsburg went off the *derech*, left the fold. Everyone in the *yeshiva* was devastated by this tragedy – especially the *Rav*. One of the *rabbanim* connected with the *yeshiva* suggested to the *Rav* that the reason that this tragedy occurred (in Satmar) might be the size of the *yeshiva*. The institution was bursting at the seams, and it was no longer

possible for each *rebbe* to give individual attention to every student. As a result, students became lost in the shuffle, falling through the cracks. Perhaps it was a Heavenly message to decrease the size of the *yeshiva*.

The *Rav* listened and immediately responded, "I feel that we have superb supervision in our *yeshiva*. This is not the reason that this young man went off the *derech*. Take a look at Eisav *ha'rasha*, the wicked. Surely he had an excellent education living in the home of *Yitzchak Avinu*. He could not have asked for a better *chavrusa*, study partner, than Yaakov. [Clearly, the reason that Eisav became an apostate at a young age had nothing to do with his upbringing.] Conversely, Avraham *Avinu* grew up in the home of Terach, an idolater, whose business was the proliferation of idols. One could not have asked for a worse environment. Yet, our holy Patriarch emerged unscathed from an environment that was an unholy alliance between moral corruption and paganism.

"Therefore," continued the *Rav*, "we must say that, at times, it is a *gezeirah min haShomayim*, Heavenly decree, that a child go off the *derech*. *Al pi derech ha'teva*, according to the laws of nature (the normal pattern of life), a child who follows paganism is not the product of a home steeped in piety and righteousness. Likewise, we rarely find a righteous, committed child emerging from a home that is the paragon of moral and spiritual corruption. Yet, these phenomena do occur. It must be, as *Ramban* writes (in his commentary to *Parashas Netzavim*), that this is one of the mysteries of the workings of Heaven. We do not understand why Hashem decreed this. It is beyond our ability to grasp."

In conclusion, the *Rav* said, *Avada, darfmen tuen ales vos men ken tzu rateven a Yiddishe neshamah. Men darf mussaren a bachur, reden tzu em, un zen vos men ken oiftuen. Fundesvegen, zehnt men amol az noch alle peulos vos men tuet bleibt men mit gornisht. Muz dos zein di sibah*, "Veritably, we must do everything possible to save a Jewish soul. We must rebuke, speak to him and see whatever we can do (to help him). Nonetheless, we see that, upon occasion, despite everything that we do, we remain with nothing. (Under such circumstances,) we must assume that this (Heavenly decree) is the reason (source of the problem)."

ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו
Yitzchak love Eisav because game was in his mouth. (25:28)

Horav Chaim, zl, m'Chernowitz, author of the *Be'er*

Mayim Chaim, had a son who had gone off the *derech*. Nonetheless, *Rav Chaim* did not turn his back on him, treating him in the same loving manner that he manifest towards his other children. He would say, “I ask of Hashem that He act towards his sons in the same manner that I act towards mine. Thus, when Jews sin and are deserving of censure, Hashem will have mercy on them.”

Horav Meir, zl, m’Premishlan was a disciple of *Rav Chaim* and acutely aware of his revered *Rebbe’s* love for his son – despite the son’s poor choice of religious lifestyle. *Rav Meir* felt that his *Rebbe’s hanhagah*, customary practice, in dealing with his son (thereby intimating to others who are confronted with a similar trying circumstance to act accordingly) is alluded to in the *pasuk*: “Yitzchak loved his son, because game was in his mouth.” Yitzchak *Avinu* employed the love that he maintained toward Eisav, as his own *tzayid b’fiv*, game in his mouth, validating factor, to appeal to Hashem. Yitzchak could say, “Hashem, I love Eisav, despite his nefarious behavior. I ask You to do the same for *Klal Yisrael*.”

The *Chafetz Chaim (Shemiras Halashon)* quotes the *Zohar HaKodesh*, who says: “One who is in the habit of guarding his tongue, and seeks to justify the behavior of his fellow, the Ministering Angels will (likewise) validate his behavior before Hashem.”

ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיניו מראות

And it was when Yitzchak became old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing. (27:1)

Rashi explains that Yitzchak *Avinu’s* premature vision loss was due to the smoke that Eisav’s wives raised when they burned incense for their idols. Alternatively, when he was bound upon the Altar of the *Akeidah*, as Avraham *Avinu* was about to slaughter him, the Heavens opened up and the Ministering Angels saw what was happening to him. They began to cry, their tears descending and falling on Yitzchak’s eyes, causing them to dim later in life. In his *hesped*, eulogy, for his son, who had died an untimely death, **Horav Shmuel Birnbaum, zl**, asked why was it necessary for the Heavens to open in order for the Angels to see Yitzchak. The Heavenly Angels’ perception is quite acute, allowing them to see what transpires on our world without the ‘aid’ of the Heavens opening up.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explained this based upon a well-known incident that occurred concerning the *Ramban*, who had a student who became ill and passed away at a young age. Prior to his death the *Ramban* had asked him specific questions, for which he sought a “Heavenly” response. (There were questions concerning issues and occurrences which take place in this world with which the *Ramban* grappled philosophically.) He asked his student to appear to him in a dream with the answers. The student died, and, shortly afterwards, appeared to the *Ramban*, who asked him for the explanations to his queries. The soul of the student replied that, in Heaven, these are not questions. This means that the Heavenly perspective encompasses such a wide scope of data – past, present and future – that whatever questions one might have (in this world) are no longer relevant in the World of Truth. In Heaven, reward and punishment take on a new appearance. One is privy to a global perspective which circumvents any ambiguity, since everything is now crystal clear and unambiguous.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explained that this is why the Heavens required opening in order for the Angels to weep. Otherwise, they could not sense the compelling emotions that emerged as a result of the *Akeidah*. The question that arose was: how a father who had been

childless for most of his life could be asked to sacrifice his only son – his future legacy – the very seed of the nation that was to be built from him. Can anyone imagine the emotional trauma that coursed through Yitzchak, knowing that his aged mother and father would now be bereft of their child, their destiny? So much pain, so much tragedy, so much equivocalty. In Heaven, however, the orientation is different. There are no questions. There, the *Akeidah* is viewed from an entirely different perspective. Unless the Heavens were opened, so that the Angels could view the *Akeidah* from an earthly perspective, they could not weep, because they had no reason to express emotion. When they saw the *Akeidah* through the human lens, they saw questions, they saw pain; they wept.

We are confronted daily with questions for which we have no answers – other than we have these questions only because we see the surface. Our perspective is not all-inclusive; we see a limited image of reality. We may rest assured that, in Heaven, there are no questions. Everything makes sense.

We have a similar exposition from an earlier sage, none other than the Advocate of *Klal Yisrael*, **Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, Berditchever**, which underscores this idea (cited by *Rav Chaim Nakaz* in *Hahe’arah she’b’nistar*). *Chazal (Berachos 34b)* relate that when the son of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (the *Nasi* and leader of the Jewish People at the time) became dangerously ill, he went to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and asked him to pray for his son. Rabbi Chanina lay his head between his knees and sought Divine mercy for Rabbi Chanina’s son – and he lived. The *Talmud* goes on to explain why Rabbi Chanina’s prayer had such efficacy when, in fact, Rabbi Yochanan was his *Rebbe* and greater than he in Torah erudition. The question which glares at us is: Why did Rabbi Chanina adopt such a physical position (head between his knees) in order to pray? Is one specific physical stance during prayer more conducive for an effective entreaty?

The *Berditchever* explains that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was on a high spiritual plane. His mind was in the Heavens, in a place that, wherever his eyes gazed, he saw truth in its pure, pristine and unembellished form. From this vantage point everything that Hashem did was perfectly clear. In order to pray with the proper emotion, one must sense the pain of he who is suffering. Thus, in order to pray effectively for mercy for Rabbi Yochanan’s son, Rabbi Chanina placed his head between his knees, intimating that he was descending from the realm of spirituality to this physical world of pain and adversity, where very little is understood, where pain is a constant companion, where adversity is a way of life. It was only in this world that he could entreat Hashem to have compassion on Rabbi Yochanan’s son.

ויאמר יעקב אל אביו אנכי עשׂו בכורך

Yaakov said to his father, “It is I, Eisav your firstborn.” (27: 19)

If one studies *Chumash* only on a cursory level, merely translating the *pesukim*, he will leave in a state of ambiguity when confronting the lives of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs. This is especially true upon studying the life of Yitzchak *Avinu* and his relationship with his twins – Yaakov and Eisav. On the one hand, we are taught that Yitzchak was the *olah temimah*, perfect sacrifice, the individual who most represented total selflessness to Hashem, the Patriarch who is singular in Fear of Heaven. On the other hand, we find this same holy Patriarch falling for Eisav’s ruse. Did he not see through Eisav, through his sycophancy, his lies, his evil?

Then we have Yaakov *Avinu*, the *bechir haAvos*, the

chosen one of the Patriarchs – the individual who represents *emes*, truth, the paradigm of integrity – lying to his father, claiming that he is Eisav. Furthermore, his mother, the Matriarch Rivkah, set him up to this! As I said, on the surface, none of this makes sense. Thus, we must delve into the works of the commentators, both in *niglah*, revealed Torah, and *nistar*, hidden/mystical Torah.

Targum Onkeles writes: *Ki tzayid b’fiv*; “For game was in his mouth.” *Ari m’tzeido ka’achil*; “Since he ate of his hunt.” This implies that Yitzchak loved Eisav because he supported his father. **Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl**, explains that a *mitzvah* does not lose its infinite value – despite its being covered with the dross of evil that was so much a part of Eisav. Yet, Yitzchak sensed the *kedushah*, holiness, imbedded within the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud Av*, honoring one’s father.

That covers the *niglah*. From a *nistar* perspective, Eisav executed the *mitzvah* to the fullest extent of its *kedushah*, because concealed deep within Eisav’s spiritual psyche was the *Torah She’Ba’al Peh*, Oral Law, which would be expounded by the descendants of *geirim*, righteous converts, who would descend from him, such as: Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir. These holy *neshamos* were trapped within the likes of Eisav, and it was through these sacred spiritual entities that he was able to carry out the *mitzvah* of *Kibbud av*, to the point that Yitzchak sensed the holiness that emanated from the food that Eisav brought him.

We might add that *tzayid b’fiv*, game was in his mouth, refers to the *Torah She Ba’al Peh*, Oral Law, which Eisav held within him. *B’fiv*, in his mouth, refers to the Torah that is transmitted by mouth – *Torah She Ba’al Peh*.

Furthermore, explains *Rav Charlap*, whatever evil one is able to perceive results from the evil embedded within a person’s psyche. Even if one does not manifest this evil (in any way), if he is able to notice evil, it is because it is inherent within him. Thus, Yitzchak *Avinu*, whose soul left him while he lay on the *Akeidah* prepared to die for Hashem, became sanctified like no other human being. When he was resurrected, he received a pure soul, untainted by any vestige of evil. Thus, he was not permitted to leave the Holy Land. Since Yitzchak was essentially pure, he could not perceive any evil, he did not possess any within himself. One cannot see what one does not possess within oneself. He saw only the good in Eisav. As unlikely as it may seem to us, Yitzchak was different. Rivkah saw what Yitzchak could not. She had been raised in the cradle of evil with Lavan, her pernicious brother. Consequently, Yitzchak and Rivkah had contrasting views of their errant son, Eisav.

Having established that Eisav in some way channeled *Torah She Ba’al Peh* via the holy souls of the *Tannaim* who were trapped within him, *Rav Charlap* explains Yaakov *Avinu’s* declaration to his father: “It is I, Eisav, your firstborn.” Our People have been miserably labeled and persecuted for what the anti-Semitic world considers to be “Jacob’s lie.” When we view this statement from the vantage point of the Oral Law trapped within Eisav, the same Oral Law that gave such pleasure to Yitzchak, the Oral Law which allowed him to love Eisav, we understand what Yaakov meant with this ambiguous statement, “I am Eisav, your firstborn.” The love that you (Father) have for Eisav is due to the *Torah She Ba’al Peh*, which is my domain! Those *neshamos* are mine, which somehow became trapped within Eisav. In other words, Father, whatever good that you perceive in Eisav is from me. I am Eisav, your firstborn. The part of Eisav, which you love, is actually me – Yaakov!

ויתן לך האלקים מטל השמים ומשמני הארץ And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth. (27:28)

ויאמר אליו הנה משמני הארץ יהיה מושבך ומטל השמים מעל

Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and of the dew of the heaven above. (27:39)

Two blessings: Yaakov *Avinu* received the first one from his father, Yitzchak *Avinu*. Eisav received the second blessing after he discovered that Yaakov had preceded him in blessing. At face value, both blessings are material in nature and quite similar. Both sons were promised blessings from the fat of the land and dew from the Heavens above. *Chazal*, however, detect what appears on the surface to be a stylistic difference in the syntax of the *pasuk*. Being that verse (28) begins the text of the blessing, which is a new topic, the conjunction *vov* – *v’yitein*, and (may G-d) give, seems superfluous. *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* who interpret this as continuous blessing, occurring repeatedly. Furthermore, the definite article Hashem’s Name, *Elokim*, underscores this blessing as emanating from Hashem when He acts in the role of *Elokim*, employing the *Middah*, Attribute, of *Din*. Strict Mercy, which is in contrast with the Name Hashem, implying *Rachamim*, Mercy. Thus, Yitzchak was intimating to Yaakov that his blessing was contingent upon his being worthy of the blessing. With regard to Eisav, however, the *pasuk* speaks unconditionally, implying that Eisav’s minions will receive their material blessing regardless of their worthiness.

The **Sefas Emes** explains that the difference between Yaakov and Eisav’s blessings lies in the *vav* of Yaakov’s blessing. Eisav’s blessing granted him immediate and unconditional material prosperity. The predominant aspect of Yaakov’s blessing was that it gave him constant connection to the Source of *brachah* – Hashem. He gives, and then He gives again.

Our Patriarch received enough to sustain him – and no more. When that would run out, he would turn to Hashem in prayer and ask. This constant connection in not a punishment. It is a sign of the unabiding love that exists between Hashem and the Jewish People. This love must be earned, but ultimately engenders the greatest good – closeness with Hashem.

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, zl, interprets the *v’yitein* as an admonition to Yaakov to always remember the Source of his blessing. Under no circumstances should Yaakov (or his descendants) think that what they receive is in their own merit. It is all a gift from Hashem. This is essentially how a Jew should think. Whatever he needs is provided by Hashem; whatever he wants – that is something altogether different.

Understandably, much commentary has been written to explain the concept of *yitein v’yachzor v’yitein*. When the Torah writes: And Hashem will give you, it already implies constant giving. Why, then, does *Rashi* feel it incumbent to write, “And then He will return and give you again.” When a person blesses his friend with material abundance, he does not need to reiterate, “May G-d give you abundance and may He give you abundance again.” It is obvious that consistency is part of the blessing.

There is one brilliant homily from **Horav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, zl**, the *Piascesner Rav*, who presided in Warsaw during World War II, which is noteworthy, for it focuses on the *matzav*, the prevalent status, both physically and emotionally, of the Jewish population at the time. First, a bit of background.

The *Piascesner’s Eish Kodesh*, from which this *dvar*