

# TOLDOS



## INSPIRATION

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### CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

רַבֵּקָה בַּת בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדוֹן אָרָם אָחוֹת לְרָן הָאֲרָמִי (בראשית כה:כ)

Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean. (Bereishis 25:20)

The focus on Rebecca's family in this verse can be understood in light of a comment of the Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Torah's depiction of the Jewish people in Egypt. On the verse, And He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation" (46:3), the Targum comments: [only] There will God make us into a great nation. Furthermore, the Baal Haggadah exegetically derives from the verse: "This teaches that the Jews there became distinguished and distinctive."

Only in the midst of Egypt were the descendants of Abraham able to develop

into a great nation.

In another context that change would not have taken place. To develop the qualities that characterize our nation - mercy, modesty and loving kindness - we had to be thrust into the vortex of power, might and brutal force, and experience the antithesis of our ethos. Only through exposure to these adverse character traits could we achieve our true essence as a people. In the same way, Joseph had to be sold to an executioner, for otherwise he would not have been able to appreciate Jacob's greatness.

The verse in Songs of Songs notes, "As a rose among the thorns, so is my beloved among the young women." The rose, a soft-petaled flower, flourishes specifically among thorns. The nation's greatness was due to its suffering among the Egyptians and the recognition that its

moral heritage was entirely different. For the same reason, the Torah emphasized Rebecca's genealogical background.

Only by growing up in such an adverse environment could she truly appreciate the greatness of the world of Abraham.

(Darosh Darash Yosef, pp. 67-68)

אֲשֶׁר חָפְרוּ בַיָּמֵי אַבְרָהָם אָבִיו (בראשית כו:יח)

[The wells] which they had dug in the days of his father, Abraham. (Bereishis 26:18)

Isaac's birth was connected with laughter. According to some, Genesis 21:6 is translated as follows: "And Sarah said: God has made laughter for me; everyone that hears will laugh on account of me." Rashi and Onkelos render the word not as laughter, but as joy. Other commentators, among them Jonathan ben Uzziel,

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### ON TAKING RESPONSIBILITY



In this week's parsha, we read about the birth of Rebecca and Isaac's two children. We learn that Rebecca had two sons; Jacob and Esau. The Torah says that Rebecca's two children struggled inside of her at the same time.

God said to Rivkah, "Two nations are in your womb" (Bereishis 25:23), referring to the two different kingdoms her sons will rule, one being Yaakov, who led and guided the Jewish people, and the other being Esav, who was the ancestor of Amalek. Later in Jewish history, Amalek tried to destroy the Jewish people.

Rebecca, who was such a holy woman, had two children inside of her that were representatives of two completely opposing nations. So, how is it possible that such a holy woman, Rebecca, could have one child born to lead the Jewish people and another who would try to destroy them?

Also, how can it be that this terrible child can come from two of the holiest and most important figures in the Jewish religion?

The answer to this question is that no one can use other people as an excuse

for their own failures. Everyone has their own choice in life. Some people might have it more difficult than others to make the right choice, but that still cannot be used as an excuse to make the wrong decisions. The more difficult the choice is, the bigger the reward is going to be. Eisav had the ability to be a great Jewish leader, but he used his capabilities to do the wrong thing as an excuse to not do the right thing, which ultimately made Eisav into the evil figure the Torah makes him out to be.

Abbie Fleeter is a member of NCSY's National Teen Board.

# FIVELIGHTS

## 5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

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# 1

No biblical child left behind? In one of the most controversial passages in his work on Chumash, Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch criticizes Yitzchak for the way he educates his children, Yaakov and Eisav.

Rav Hirsch explains that **Yitzchak made a critical error in the way he educated his children: He educated them the same way.** As Rav Hirsch explains, each child needs their own individual approach to self-esteem, personal development, and spirituality. You can't educate Yaakov the same way you educate Eisav. Each requires their own path and their own approach.

As teachers often say, "If a child cannot learn in the way we teach, we must teach in the way the child can learn." With the right individualized form of education, no children will be left behind.

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# 2

"Does a geometry teacher have to be a triangle?"

The Torah's answer to this remark (which is sometimes attributed to Bertrand Russel, a famous ethicist accused of immorality) is a resounding "Yes!"

In the Haftorah for Toldos, the following verse appears, *כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא* - "For a priest's lips shall guard knowledge, and teaching should be sought from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts." (Malachi 2:7).

The Talmud in Moed Katan 17a derives from this verse that when learning Torah from a teacher **the teacher should be comparable to an angel.** In the relationship between a Torah teacher and student, it is not enough to impart information – we need to embody the information. Indeed, we need to become triangles.

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# 3

Knowing that there is always a way back home is the ultimate blessing. Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, in his work Sefas Emes (632) explains that Yitzchak really knew that Eisav was not righteous, which is why his intended blessing for Eisav was that **no matter how far he strayed there would always be a way for him to return to a life of holiness.**

Eisav, however, sold his blessing. Yaakov, then received the power, which he imparted to his children, that **no matter how far a Jew strays they will always have the ability to return to God.** Yitzchak originally had Eisav in mind for this power, but now it is in Yaakov's hands. Thanks to Yitzchak's blessing, as the Sefas Emes explains, "even when we are distant, we are able to find an element of holiness."

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# 4

There are many doors to enter to begin a relationship with God. Each of our forefathers, the Avos, had their own relationship with God. Hence, explains the Ramban (see 26:3), each of the forefathers swore separately to God.

In fact, Rabbi Meir Eisenstadt, in his responsa Panim Meiros (1:39), was asked why the language in Shemonah Esrei is "Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v'Elokei Yaakov." Why not just say, "Elokei Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov"? **Why must the name of God appear before each one?**

He explained that **each of our forefathers developed their own relationship with God** and we emphasize that by mentioning God's name next to each one in our prayers. Our forefathers didn't just continue their relationship with God, they each developed a new one.

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# 5

Who's on first? If you're not specific, it is easy to be misunderstood.

God, however, seems to be extremely vague when describing the future of Rivkah's children to her: "Two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides shall be separated; the might shall pass from one regime to the other, and the elder shall serve the younger." (25:23)

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, in his commentary, Ha'amek Davar, notes that this verse is very vague. Which son, Yaakov or Eisav, is which? Why wasn't God more explicit in identifying which son would rule the other?

Rabbi Berlin explains that it is deliberately ambiguous in order to impart the historical truth that **the futures of Yaakov and Eisav will forever be inversely correlated.** When one rises, the other falls. Sometimes Yaakov will be on top, other times Eisav will rule. But history will always have their fates invariably, yet inversely, linked together.

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# SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

<b>TARGUM YONASAN 25:21</b>	Prayer can change God's mind.
<b>RABBEINU BACHAYE 25:21</b>	On the struggle to have children.
<b>RASHBAM 25:22</b>	Where does Rivkah go to seek God?
<b>KLI YAKAR 25:22</b>	Rivkah needed to clarify the very nature of God's existence.
<b>TARGUM YONASON 25:29</b>	Why was Yaakov making soup?
<b>RAMBAN 26:5</b>	Did the Avos keep the Torah? Or, better phrased, WHERE did the Avos keep the whole Torah?
<b>SEFORNO 26:5</b>	When Yitzchak left Avraham's shadow.
<b>RAMBAN 26:20</b>	There is something deep hidden in Yitzchak's wells.
<b>SEFORNO 27:2</b>	Blessings before death have a special power.
<b>RABBEINU BACHAYE 27:4</b>	Foodies may be more in touch with the divine spirit.

This parsha completes the introduction to the unique personality and style in service of God for each of the Avos. In the fabulous biography of Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld by Rav Sruli Besser, the theme of individuality in avodas Hashem is emphasized over and over again:

*In a discussion with talmidim about setting realistic, attainable goals, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld shared a personal story.*

*"I read somewhere that the Klausenberger Rebbe wouldn't start davening until he had some novel insight, some fresh appreciation for the words of tefillah. So one morning I decided that I, too, would implement that custom in my life.*

*I sat down early in the morning; closely studying the words in the siddur, waiting for inspiration to strike. I sat there for quite a while with no success. It got later and I grew hungrier, but still no chiddush.*

*The end was that I davened later than usual, without the same concentration as usual."*

*Reb Shlomo smiled: "I learned that day that I am not the Klausenberger Rebbe." A good idea is only good if it works for you.*

*Rebbe would stress again and again that the biggest error in avodas Hashem is to imitate the service of another.*

*Reb Shlomo had a minhag not to touch the atzei chaim on the Sefer Torah when he received an aliyah. When he was a young rav, he had once traveled to the Catskills for Shabbas and had been responsible for bringing a Sefer Torah to the bungalow colony where he was staying. He arrived at his destination very close to Shabbas, and in his haste, he handed the Sefer Torah to a young boy, asking him to hurry it over to the shul before the onset of Shabbas.*

*Later on, Reb Shlomo decided that by giving the Sefer Torah to a child, he had slighted its honor. From that time on, he never again touched the handles of the sefer with his bare hands.*

*One day, he noticed that a talmid receiving an aliyah was imitating his minhag and grasping the handles through his tallis.*

*Uncharacteristically, Reb Shlomo began to shout at him, "No, no! It's not for you; it's for me!"*



# CONVERSATIONS WITH RABBI ISRAEL LASHAK



Rabbi Israel Lashak is NCSY's Senior Educator.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE TORAH IDEA?

There are so many Torah concepts that I absolutely love. This one really speaks to me: Commentators tell us that the Tree of Life was located exactly in the center of the Garden of Eden. Why so specific?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that regardless where you come from, you can always reach the Etz HaChayim, which symbolizes the World to Come. Obviously, the fastest and easiest way to get to Olam Haba is by learning Torah, but there are many other ways, too - honesty in business, respect to your wife and children, removing suffering from the world.

In today's world, many Jewish parents try to influence their children to become a Talmud Chacham, but ultimately, not every kid was created to attend yeshiva or seminary. So if you are not a Torah Scholar, does that mean you aren't amazing? NO! A friend of mine runs Hatzalah in Israel saving thousands of

lives. You're going to tell me that because he didn't learn Torah, he isn't receiving a portion in the World to Come?!

Find a mitzvah that speaks to you that removes suffering in the world - participate in Save a Child's Heart, volunteer with Ethiopian Jewry, or work as a nurse in a hospital. I really believe parents should be very careful with what they tell their kids. Ultimately, there are many different ways people can reach the Tree of Life, no matter the direction they are approaching the garden from.

## WHO IS YOUR JEWISH INSPIRATION?

There are so many people who have guided me to where I am and more importantly, where I want to be. But I would have to say that my Jewish inspirations are my mother and my wife. Most people tell you that everything they learned, they learned in yeshiva... but not me. The most important lessons I learned in my life were taught to me by either my mother or my wife.

So whenever you're ready to get married, lift up your eyes and reach to the stars.

Do not settle with someone mediocre. Make sure the person you marry makes you want to be better. When I look at my wife every day, I pinch myself to realize how lucky I am to marry someone like her. She makes me want to improve myself and she kicks me every morning to go learn Torah.

## IF YOU WERE IN HIGH SCHOOL RIGHT NOW, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU TELL YOURSELF?

I have only one regret in my life: that I didn't take care of my health better. Just like every strong teenager, I thought I was invincible. I wish I could advise my younger self to exercise and watch what I eat. You know, you aren't going to live forever, and you're not always going to be physically capable. You have to take care of this incredible body that HaKadosh Barch Hu gave you because this body allows us to participate in beautiful mitzvot. Basically, don't eat so many schwarmas.

Interview conducted by **Liat Levkovich**, member of NCSY's National Board.

## CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV CONTINUED FROM FRONT

translate the word "laughter" literally. People laughed at the event. They did not believe that Isaac would inherit Abraham—that he, a young lad of the new generation, would continue to carry out Abraham's visions and laws, and that he would engage in building altars and calling on the name of God. When Abraham dies, people said, his entire philosophy will perish, his altars will be dismantled.

They did not hate Isaac; they simply belittled him. They laughed, they derided, but they did not hate.

Years passed. Those who were wont to laugh at Isaac and the hopes that Abraham pinned on him suddenly began to ask: Is Isaac really sincere in his efforts to resuscitate Abraham's work? What is

going on? They rubbed their eyes. Isaac was indeed continuing with Abraham's enterprises. He was fighting for the same ideals, doing the same things his father had done!

The laughter ceased. They stopped making jokes on Isaac's account and began to fight against him. In place of derision came jealousy and hatred. The "scoffers of the time," who were wont to bandy jokes, stories and slanders about Abraham and Sarah, suddenly became the "wicked of the time," who thought to crush Isaac. Now they recognized his existence; now they felt hatred and jealousy.

Jealousy, as usual, leads to oppression and persecution, but also brings about respect. They began to hate Isaac, but

they also began to respect him. In this attitude towards Isaac we may discern the first victory of Abraham's house. It is better to be an object of jealousy and hatred, which lead to respect, than an object of pity, which is always accompanied by derision and contempt.

(The Rav Speaks, pp. 108-110)

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