

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Toldot

Genesis 25:19-28:9

Torah Reading for Week of November 11-17, 2001

Toldot means "offspring" and "generations"; it also means "generations" in the more general sense—that which a person generates and produces. Thus, "the toldot of Isaac" are Isaac's two sons, Jacob and Esau, as well as the deeds and achievements of Isaac—both of which are the subject of the Torah section of Toldot.

And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham—Abraham fathered Isaac.

And Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel the Arammian of

Paddan-Aaram and sister of Laban the Arammian. But twenty years later, the couple was still childless.

Isaac entreated G-d for his wife, because she was barren; and G-d was entreated of him, and Rebecca his wife conceived.

Rebecca had a tumultuous pregnancy, as "the children struggled within her." When she inquired to G-d as to the meaning of this, she was told:

Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall diverge from your belly. One nation will struggle against the other; and the elder shall serve the younger.

The Twins

When it came time for her to give birth, behold, there were twins in her womb.

The first came out red all over like a hairy mantle; and they called his name Esau ("ready-made").

After that came out his brother, his hand holding on to Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob ("he who heels").

The passing years only accentuated the differences between them.

The boys grew; and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man

Commentary

Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham fathered Isaac (25:19)

The cynics of that generation were saying that Sarah had become pregnant from Avimelech, since she had failed to conceive in all the years she was with Abraham. What did G-d do? He formed the countenance of Isaac to resemble that of Abraham, so that all might attest that Abraham had fathered Isaac. This is the meaning of the repetitious wording of the verse: "Isaac (is certainly) the son of Abraham (since there is proof that) Abraham fathered Isaac."

(Rashi)

There are children who are embarrassed of their parents, and there are parents who are embarrassed by their children. With Abraham and Isaac it wasn't like that: Isaac prided himself in that he was "Isaac the son of Abraham," and Abraham prided himself in that "Abraham fathered Isaac."

(Midrash Tanchuma; Midrash HaGadol)

Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebecca to wife (25:20)

For three years, from the Binding of Isaac at age 37 to his marriage at age 40, Isaac was in the Garden of Eden.

(Asarah Maamarot)

Marriage is a time of increased enmeshment in the material. It is a time when one begins to engage in the most physical of human drives; it is also a time when one is forced to begin, in earnest, the business of earning a livelihood, often at the expense of loftier and more idealistic pursuits.

Thus the Zohar refers to marriage as a person's second birth: first, the soul enters into the body and assumes a physical existence, then, at a later point in life, it further "descends" into the physical state by marrying.

Therein lies the lesson to be derived from the fact that, prior to his marriage, Isaac spent three years in the Garden of Eden, abandoning the physical state for a wholly spiritual existence. In order to ensure the success of the most physical phase of a person's life, it must be prefaced by a period of spiritual preparation. Although the primary objective of our mission in life is the development and sanctification of the physical world, one must

enter that world well equipped with the spiritual vision of the divine purpose and with the spiritual fortitude to carry it out.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And the children struggled within her (25:22)

Whenever she would pass a house of prayer or house of study, Jacob would struggle to come out ... and when she passed a house of idol-worship, Esau would struggle to come out. Also, they were struggling among themselves, fighting over the inheritance of the two worlds (i.e., the material world, and the "world to come").

(Yalkut Shimoni; Rashi)

One nation will struggle against the other (25:23)

They will never be equal: when one rises, the other will fall, and vice versa.

(Rashi)

And Jacob was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents (25:27)

The academy of Shem and the academy of Eber.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Isaac loved Esau, for fed game to his mouth (25:28)

Esau would deceive him with his mouth. He would inquire of him: "Father, how does one tithe salt? Father, how does one tithe straw?" And Isaac would muse: "This son of mine, how diligent he is in the fulfillment of the commandments!"

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

Jacob cooked pottage (25:29)

That was the day on which Abraham died, and Jacob made a broth of lentils to comfort his father Isaac.

Why lentils? Just as the lentil has no mouth, so is the mourner speechless... Just as the lentil is round, so mourning comes round to all the inhabitants of this world.

(The Talmud)

Esau came from the field, and he was exhausted (25:29)

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of the field; and Jacob was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents.

They also differed in their relationship with their parents.

Isaac loved Esau, for he fed game to his mouth; Rebecca loved Jacob.

A Pot of Lentils

One day, Esau came back from the hunt exhausted and hungry; Jacob was cooking a pot of lentils.

And Esau said to Jacob: "Give me to swallow, I beg you,

of that red pottage, for I am faint"; therefore was his name called Edom (red).

And Jacob said: "Sell me this day your birthright."

And Esau said: "Behold, I am about to die, and what profit shall this birthright do to me?"

And Jacob said: "Swear to me this day." He swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised the birthright.

Water Wars

A famine forces Isaac to relocate, but G-d commands him not to leave the Holy Land and reiterates His promise that "To you and to your seed, I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father."

So instead of going to Egypt (as Abraham did, and Jacob will when famine struck the Land of Canaan), Isaac settles in Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, which is within the boundaries of the Holy Land.

He does, however, follow his father's example in presenting Rebecca as his sister, "lest the men of the place should kill me on account of Rebecca, because she was fair to look

Commentary

Esau committed five sins on that day: he dishonored a betrothed maiden, he committed a murder, he denied G-d, he denied the resurrection of the dead, and he spurned the birthright.

(The Talmud)

On that day, Esau murdered Nimrod (the king of Babel).

(Midrash)

And G-d appeared to him, and said: "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the Land" (26:2)

G-d said to him: "You are a burnt-offering without blemish; as a burnt offering becomes unfit if it passes out beyond the Temple enclosures, so will you become unfit if you go out of the Holy Land."

(Midrash Rabbah)

Isaac dug again the wells of water ... and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them (26:18)

Behold the humility of Isaac. A person acquires a house and gives it a name; then his son comes, adds a new part to it, and calls it by a different name. Not so Isaac: all the wells which Abraham dug and named, although they were entirely stopped by the Philistines, when Isaac redug them a second time he did not give them new names, but reinstated the names given them by his father.

And what reward did he receive for this? The other Patriarchs had their names changed: Abraham was first called Abram and later Abraham; Jacob was initially called Jacob and subsequently given the name Israel. Isaac, however, was given the name "Isaac" from G-d even before his birth, and his name was not changed for all generations.

(Midrash HaGadol)

And he called the name of it Sitna (animosity) (26:21)

This comes to teach us that there is not a righteous man who does not have detractors.

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And he dug another well, and for that they strove not. (26:22)

The first two wells allude to the first two Temples, which the enemies of Israel destroyed. The third well represents the Third Temple which shall speedily be built, which will be established without animosity and strife; G-d will then broaden our boundaries and all nations will serve Him in unison.

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And it came to pass that Isaac aged, and his eyes dimmed (27:1)

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Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death. (27:2)

Said Rabbi Joshua ben Korhah: When a man comes to his parents' age at the time of their death, for five years before and five years after he must fear death. For thus did Isaac reason: If I am to attain my father's years, I am yet far short of them. But if I am to attain my mother's years, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death." (Isaac was 123 years old at the time; Sarah lived 127 years; Abraham, 175).

(Midrash Rabbah)

I know not the day of my death. (27:2)

Seven things are concealed from man: the day of death, the day of the Redemption, the absolute truth in a judgment; also, no man knows how he will earn a livelihood, what is in his neighbor's heart, what a woman is bearing, and when the wicked State [Rome] will fall.

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upon." When the local king Avimelech happens to discover that they are husband and wife, he reproaches Isaac: "What have you done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would brought guiltiness upon us." Avimelech then warns his people: "He that touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." Isaac prospers in Gerar. "He had possessions of flocks, and possessions of herds, and a great store of servants." He work the soil: "Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same

year a hundredfold; for G-d blessed him." So successful was he that the previously hospitable Avimelech no longer desires his neighborship. "Go from us," he now says to Isaac, "for you have grown mightier than us." Isaac sets himself the task of reopening the wells dug by Abraham:

For all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them up, and filled them with earth... Isaac dug again the wells of water ... and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them.

Then he dug wells of his own:

Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdsmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He called the name of the well Eshek (strife), because they strove with him. And they dug another well, and strove for that also; and he called the name of it Sitna (animosity). And he removed from there, and dug another well; and for that they strove not. And he called the name of it

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Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man (27:11)

Two men, one possessing a thick head of hair and the other bald-headed, stood near a threshing-floor. When the chaff flew into the locks of the former, it became entangled in his hair; but when it flew on to the head of the bald man, he passed his hand over his head and removed it.

By the same token, the wicked Esau is polluted by sin throughout the year and has no way to achieve atonement; whereas Jacob is defiled by sin throughout the year, but has the Day of Atonement through which to procure forgiveness.

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And Rebecca took the covetous clothes of Esau...and put them on Jacob (27:15)

These are the clothes which Esau coveted from Nimrod, killing him in order to take them from him.

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And he said: "Because the L-rd you G-d sent me good speed." (27:20)

As soon as Jacob said these words, Isaac said to himself: "I know that Esau does not mention the name of the Holy One, blessed be He; since this one does mention Him, he is not Esau but Jacob." Since Jacob spoke thus, Isaac said to him: "Come near, please, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

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The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau (27:22)

"The voice is the voice of Jacob"—no prayer is effective unless the seed of Jacob has a part in it. "The hands are the hands of Esau"—no war is successful unless the seed of Esau has a share in it.

(The Talmud)

Esau went to Ishmael; and he took to wife, besides the wives he had, Machalat the daughter of Ishmael the son Abraham, and the sister of Nevayot (28:9)

What is the point of identifying Machalat as "the sister of Nevayot"? Rashi explains that this is to provide us with a clue as to Jacob's age at the time of his receiving the blessings from his father. Calling her "Nevayot's sister" indicates that her marriage to Esau took place after Ishmael's death, so that her brother, rather than her father, was the one who married her off. Yet the beginning of the verse describes how Esau went to Ishmael to arrange the marriage. This means that the event occurred right at the time of Ishmael's death.

We know that Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac (cf. Genesis 16:16); that Isaac was 60 years older than Jacob and Esau (ibid., 25:26); and that Ishmael died at age 137 (25:17). Hence, Jacob and Esau were 63 years old when Jacob stole the blessings from his brother and was sent by Isaac to Charan to take a wife from Laban's daughters.

But following other clues provided by the Torah, we deduce that Jacob arrived in Charan quite a number of years later. Upon his arrival in Egypt, Jacob tells Pharaoh that he is 130 years old (Gen. 47:9); Joseph at the time was 39 (as per 41:46 and 45:6), which means that Jacob was 91 at the time of Joseph's birth; and Joseph was born 14 years after Jacob's arrival in Charan, after he had worked for two seven-year periods for Leah and Rachel but before his third, six-year term of working in return for a portion of Laban's sheep (30:25 and 31:41).

In other words, Jacob left his parents' home in Be'er Sheva at age 63, but arrived in Charan 14 years later at age 77 (Eliezer, making the same journey a generation earlier to find a wife for Isaac, made the trip in a single day). Our sages explain that for fourteen years Jacob hid himself in the home of his ancestor and teacher, Eber (the great-grandson of Shem), where he immersed himself in the study of Torah.

Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham fathered Isaac (25:19)

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Rehovot (broad places); And he said: "For now G-d has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." At age forty, Esau takes two Hittite wives—Judith the daughter Be'eri and Basmat the daughter of Elon—who were "a grief of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca." Jacob remains an unmarried, reclusive scholar in "the tents of learning."

A Scholar in Hunter's Clothes

And it came to pass that Isaac aged, and his eyes dimmed so that he could not see; and he called Esau his eldest son, and said to him:

"...Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death.

"Now therefore take, I entreat you, your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and catch me some game. And make me savory food such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; so that my soul may bless you before I die."

Rebecca overhears her husband's words to her elder son, and is determined that Jacob, not Esau, should receive Isaac's blessing. She summons Jacob and commands him to bring her "two good kids of the goats" from the flocks, which she will prepare to resemble the "savory food" which Esau serves his father. Jacob is to take this to Isaac before Esau returns from the hunt, and receive the blessings in his brother's stead.

And Jacob said to Rebecca his mother: "Behold, Esau my

brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.

"Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to him a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing."

But Rebecca insists that he follow through with the plan. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, and covers his arms and the back of his neck with the skin of the goats from which she prepared the "game" so that he should feel like his hairy brother to his blind father's hands.

And he came to his father, and said: "My father!"

And he said: "Here am I; who are you, my son?"

And Jacob said to his father: "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done according as you have spoken to me. Arise, I entreat you, sit and eat of my game, so that your soul may bless me."

And Isaac said to his son: "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?"

And he said: "Because the L-rd your G-d sent me good speed."

The tone and content of Jacob's speech arouses Isaac's suspi-cions.

And Isaac said to Jacob: "Come near, please, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not."

And Jacob approached Isaac his father. And he felt him, and said: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau!"

Thus Jacob receives the blessings which Isaac intended for Esau:

"May G-d give to you of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.

"May peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; you shall be lord over your brethren, and your mother's sons shall bow down to you.

"Cursed be those that curse you, and blessed be those that bless you."

Flight to Charan

Esau enters his father's room just seconds after Jacob's

Commentary

resemble that of Abraham, so that all might attest that Abraham had fathered Isaac. This is the meaning of the repetitious wording of the verse: "Isaac (is certainly) the son of Abraham (since there is proof that Abraham fathered Isaac."

(Rashi)

There are children who are embarrassed of their parents, and there are parents who are embarrassed by their children. With Abraham and Isaac it wasn't like that: Isaac prided himself in that he was "Isaac the son of Abraham," and Abraham prided himself in that "Abraham fathered Isaac."

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Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebecca to wife (25:20)

For three years, from the Binding of Isaac at age 37 to his marriage at age 40, Isaac was in the Garden of Eden.

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Marriage is a time of increased enmeshment in the material. It is a time when one begins to engage in the most physical of human drives; it is also a time when one is forced to begin, in earnest, the business of earning a livelihood, often at the expense of loftier and more idealistic pursuits. Thus the Zohar refers to marriage as a person's second birth: first, the soul enters into the body and assumes a physical existence, then, at a later point in life, it further "descends" into the physical state by marrying.

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departure, and the deception is discovered; but nothing can be done. "Your brother came with cunning," says Isaac, "and has taken away your blessing... Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; with corn and wine have I sustained him. What can I do now for you, my son?"

And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau raised his voice, and wept.

But all that Isaac can offer his distraught son is a blessing that, "Your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. By your sword shall you live, and serve your brother; and it shall come to pass when you will have the dominion, that you will break his yoke from off your neck."

Esau is furious, and plots to kill Jacob. Rebecca hears of this, and tells Jacob that he must flee to Charan, to her brother

Laban.

To her husband, Rebecca says that it is time that Jacob married, and she certainly does not desire that he follow the example of his brother in marrying a Hittite woman. So Isaac summons Jacob and instructs him:

"Do not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother."

Before he goes, Isaac has an additional series of blessings for Jacob:

"G-d Almighty shall bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and you shall become a multitude of people.

"And He shall grant you the blessing of Abraham, to you, and to your seed with you, that you may inherit the land in which you sojourn, and which G-d gave to Abraham"

Our Parshah concludes by relating how Esau, seeing that his father prefers that his children marry within the family rather than with the local population, takes an additional wife— "Machlat, the daughter of Ishmael the son of Abraham and the sister of Nevayot."

Commentary

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from the Chassidic Masters

Jacob and Esau

In many respects, our Parshah's account of Isaac's family reads like a replay of Abraham's. Many years of childlessness are followed by the birth of two sons—the elder one wicked and the younger one righteous. Isaac favors the elder son, Esau, much as Abraham is sympathetic toward his elder son, Ishmael, while Rebecca, like Sarah, perseveres in her efforts to ensure that the younger, righteous son is recognized as the true heir of Abraham and the sole progenitor of the “great nation” which G-d promised to establish from his seed.

There is, however, a significant difference between the two sets of brothers.

Ishmael and Isaac were born of two different mothers: Ishmael was the son of Hagar, a former Egyptian princess still attached to her pagan ways, while Isaac was the son of the righteous Sarah. Furthermore, Ishmael was born when Abraham was still Abram and still uncircumcised, and can be said to belong to his father's imperfect past (Abraham was born into a family of idolaters and is even described as having himself worshiped idols in his youth), while Isaac was conceived after Abraham had attained the perfection signified by his name change and circumcision.

On the other hand, Esau and Jacob were *twins*, born of the same righteous mother and raised in the same holy environment. Their father, Isaac, was “a burnt-offering without blemish” who was circumcised on the eighth day of his life and who never set foot outside of the Holy Land. Unlike his father, he has no idolatrous past and no “pre-Isaac” period in his life. So where did Esau's “evil genes” come from?

Even more puzzling is the fact that Esau's wickedness seems predestined from the womb. If Esau had turned bad later in life, we might attribute this to the fact that every man is given absolute freedom of choice to be righteous or wicked. But how are we to explain Esau's gravitation to evil even before he was born?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the fact that Esau was naturally inclined toward idolatry was not, in and of itself, a negative thing. It meant that his ordained mission in life was the conquest of evil rather than the cultivation of good.

Jacob and Esau are the prototypes for two types of souls, each with a distinct role to play in the fulfillment of the Divine purpose in creation. Maimonides calls these two spiritual types “the perfectly pious” and “the one who conquers his inclinations”; Rabbi Schneur Zalman refers to them as the “Tzaddik” and the “Beinoni.” Humanity is divided into these two types, writes Rabbi Schneur Zalman in his *Tanya*, because “there are two kinds of gratification before G-d. The first is generated by the good achieved by the perfectly righteous. But G-d also delights in the conquest of evil which is still at its strongest and most powerful in the heart, through the efforts of the ordinary, unperfected individual.”

Thus Rabbi Schneur Zalman explains the Talmud passage which cites Job as crying out to G-d: “Master of the Universe! You have created righteous people, and You have created wicked people!” The actual righteousness or wickedness of a person is not predetermined by G-d—in the words of Maimonides, free choice is “A fundamental principle and a pillar of the Torah and its commandments,” without which “What place would the entire Torah have? And by what measure of justice would G-d punish the wicked and reward the righteous?” Yet Job is right—G-d does indeed create “righteous people” and “wicked people” in the sense that while certain souls enjoy a life wholly devoted to developing what is good and holy in G-d's world, other souls must struggle against negative traits and ominous perversions implanted within them in order to elicit that special delight that can come only from the conquest of evil.

This, says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, is the deeper significance of Rashi's commentary on the opening words of our Parshah. Citing the verse, “And these are the generations of Isaac,” Rashi comments: “Jacob and Esau who are mentioned in the *Parshah*.” The simple meaning of this commentary is the word *toldot* (“generations”) can also refer to a person's deeds and achievements (cf. Rashi's commentary on Genesis 6:9); Rashi is telling us that here the word *toldot* is to be understood in its literal sense—the children of Isaac, though these are named only further on in the Parshah.

On a deeper level, says the Rebbe, Rashi is addressing the question: How does an “Esau” come to be a descendant of Isaac and Rebecca? How do two perfectly righteous individuals produce an offspring who is evil *from birth*?

So Rashi tells us: the “generations of Isaac” are the “Jacob and Esau *who are mentioned in the Parshah*.” The wicked Esau we know is not a product of Isaac but the result of Esau's own failure to overpower his negative inclinations. The Esau of the *Parshah*—Esau as viewed from the

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perspective of Torah, where everything is seen in its innermost and truest light—is not evil, but the instrument of evil's conquest. The Esau of the *Parshah* is the purveyor of the “second delight” and an indispensable element of the purpose of life on earth.

In this also lies the deeper deeper meaning of the Midrash that describes Jacob and Esau fighting in the womb “over the inheritance of the two worlds” (i.e., the material world, and the “world to come”). This would seem to be one area in which they would have no quarrel: the Esau we know desires the materialism of the physical world and shuns everything that is G-dly and spiritual, while the reverse is true of Jacob. So what were they fighting over?

Explains the Rebbe: The “World to Come” is not a reality that is disconnected from our present existence. Rather, it is the *result* of our present-day efforts in dealing with and perfecting the material world. The world of Moshiach is the culmination of all positive achievements of history, the era in which the cosmic yield of mankind's every good deed will come to light.

In other words, our present world is the means and the World to Come is the goal. This is the deeper significance of Jacob's claim on the World to Come, and Esau's (and here we speak of the “Torah's Esau,” the righteous conqueror of his inclinations) preference for the present world. Jacob sees perfection as the only desirable state of man, while Esau sees the struggle with imperfection as desirable in and of itself.

Yet both Jacob and Esau recognize the necessity for both of “the two worlds,” for the process and its outcome. The “perfectly pious” man also requires the material world as the vehicle that leads to ultimate perfection. And the “conqueror” also sees perfection as the goal to which his efforts lead. For although his purpose in life is defined by the process itself, a process, by definition, must have a goal.

So this is their “fight”. Jacob and Esau each lay claim to *both* worlds as part of their life's endeavor. But their priorities are reversed. To the Jacobs of the world, the material world is but a tool, a means to an end. To its Esaus, man's material involvements and the struggles they entail are what life is all about. A futuristic vision of perfection is neces-

sary, but only as a reference-point that provides coherence and direction to the “real” business of life.

The tension between them over their differing visions of the “two worlds” is not a negative thing. It is the result of two world views, both positive and necessary, both indispensable components of man's mission in life.

Isaac's Wells

Three Torah sections—*Lech-Lecha*, *Vayeira* and *Chayei Sarah*—chronicle the life and deeds of Abraham. An even greater number are devoted to the life of Jacob. Isaac is the central figure in only one—the Parshah of *Toldot*. We read of the “Binding of Isaac” in *Vayeira*, but there the story is told wholly from Abraham's perspective. Similarly, the greater part of *Chayei Sarah* is about how a wife is found for Isaac, but Isaac himself is not at all involved in the process. Eliezer doesn't even mention him by name when he proposes the match—he's simply “the son of my master.” This scarcity of information about Isaac is even more striking in light of the fact that he was the most long-lived of the three Patriarchs (Isaac lived 180 years, as opposed to Abraham's 175 and Jacob's 147).

Even in *Toldot*, we are hard-pressed to find some clues to Isaac's identity and personality. The first part of *Toldot* relates the birth and early years of Jacob and Esau. The latter part is about how the aged and blind Isaac has his plans to bless his elder son Esau foiled by Rebecca and Jacob. It is only in the middle part of *Toldot* (Genesis, ch 26) that we encounter an active Isaac. We read how he relocates to Gerar, how he farms the land (the only one of the Patriarchs to do so) and how he digs wells.

In fact, the one activity of Isaac's on which the Torah elaborates at some length is his well-digging. We are told how he reopened the wells originally dug by Abraham, and are given a detailed account of a series of wells of his own which he dug—the names he gave them, and his struggles to retain control over them.

But it is precisely this lack of notoriety which defines the essence of Isaac. The Kabbalists equate Abraham with the *sefirah* (Divine attribute) of *Chessed*, “lovingkindness”, and Isaac with the *sefirah* of *Gevurah*, restraint. Abraham was the very embodiment of kindness, generosity and concern for one's fellow. He was the ultimate extrovert—constantly giving of himself, constantly extending himself to G-d, to his fellow man, to the world. Isaac was his father's diametric opposite: he was awe to Abraham's love, restraint to Abraham's expansiveness, self-effacement to Abraham's self-assertion.

From Abraham we inherited the charitableness and social commitment that is the hallmark of our people. Isaac

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bequeathed to us the fear of Heaven in the heart of the Jew—his self-censoring discipline, his silent sacrifice, his humble awe before the majesty of his Creator.

Abraham's love of G-d and humanity took him on a journey from the self outward—a journey etched in the roads of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Canaan. Isaac never left the boundaries of his homeland. For his was an inward journey, a journey into the depths of self to the essence within.

Thus Isaac is portrayed as a farmer and a well-digger. Isaac was a farmer, one who has learned the profound secret of the seed: that growth and profit come only when one allows oneself to disintegrate and become one with the soil from which one has come. Isaac was a digger of wells, boring through the stratum of emotion and experience in search of the quintessential waters of the soul. Boring deeper than feeling, deeper than desire, deeper than achievement, to the selflessness at the core of self.

The Stolen Blessings

The story of the stolen blessings is often understood as a contest between the two brothers for the legacy of Abraham and Isaac, with Isaac mistakenly taking Esau to be the worthy heir, while Rebecca, knowing the true nature of her elder son, devising the plan that would place Jacob at Isaac's bedside at the crucial moment.

However, a closer reading of the Torah's account indicates that Isaac was well aware of the difference between his two children. Jacob almost gave himself away when he said, in reply to his father's question about how he managed to find game so quickly, "The L-rd your G-d sent me good speed"; Isaac knew that Esau did not speak that way, and immediately suspected that the son before him was Jacob rather than Esau.

In fact, by the time we reach the end of the story, it is quite clear that Isaac never intended to bequeath the spiritual legacy of Abraham—the Divine promise to make his seed a great nation and to give them the Holy Land as their eternal heritage—to Esau

When Esau discovers that Jacob has received the blessings, he begs Isaac, "Bless me, too, my father!" "But I have made him your master," says Isaac, "I have given him [the blessings of] grain and wine. What can I do for you now, my son?" "Have you only one blessing, my father?!" sobs Esau. "Bless me too, my father!" Finally, Isaac blesses Esau that "Of the fatness of the land shall be your dwelling, and of the dew of heaven above" (the fat of the land and the dew of heaven themselves having already been granted to Jacob), and promises him that should the descendants of Jacob sin and become unworthy of their blessings, they will forfeit their mastery over Esau's descendants in material affairs. This is the best he can do for his beloved elder son.

But in the very next chapter we read how Isaac summons Jacob to him, and... blesses him. "May G-d Almighty bless you," says Isaac, "make you fruitful, and multiply you, and you shall become a populous nation. And may He grant you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants, that you may inherit the land of your dwelling, which G-d has given to Abraham"—blessings which had not been included in his earlier benedictions to either son.

So Isaac never intended to make Esau the father of the people of Israel, never thought to bequeath the Holy Land to him, never considered him heir to "the blessing of Abraham." There were two distinct blessings in Isaac all along (Esau seems to have sensed this when he cried, "Have you only one blessing, my father?!"), intended for his two sons: Jacob was to be given the spiritual legacy of Abraham, while Esau was to be granted the blessings of the material world.

Isaac desired that a partnership should be formed between his two sons: that the scholarly, unworldly Jacob should devote himself to spiritual pursuits, while Esau should apply his conning and worldliness to the constructive development of the material world, in support of and in harmony with Jacob's holy endeavors.

Rebecca disagreed: both worlds must be given to Jacob. There cannot be "two departments," for the material world cannot be entrusted to materialists. Only one who is steeped in the Divine wisdom can know how to make proper use of G-d world. Only one who possesses a spiritual outlook and value system will be able to master the physical reality rather than be mastered by it.