

SOMETIMES IT PAYS TO COME FROM A CORRUPT ENVIRONMENT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1052 – Seudas Hav'ra'ah and Sending Food During Shiva. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Toldos always presents a big challenge to us because of the fact that Yaakov *Avinu* engaged in what can best be called "trickery" to obtain his father's *brachos* [blessings]. It is puzzling that logically speaking, the *brachos* which Yaakov received and which Yitzchak initially intended to give to Eisav in fact seem more appropriate for Eisav than for Yaakov.

The *brachos* are all about *gashmiyus* [material matters]: "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine." [Bereishis 27:28]. The *brachos* granted Yaakov dominion over his enemies, and so forth. We must remember that Yaakov was "a wholesome man, abiding in tents" [Bereishis 25:27]. He was the quintessential *yeshiva bochur*. All he needed was a Gemara and a *shtender* and that's it!

What is Yaakov *Avinu* going to do with all this *gashmiyus*? He does not need it! All he is looking for is "bread to eat and clothes to wear" [Bereishis 28:20]. So it appears that Yitzchak, in fact, had it right in wanting to give the *brachos* of materialism to Eisav and not to Yaakov.

The *sefer* Chikrei Lev (Rav Leibel Hyman) suggests a very interesting approach to this observation. He writes that Yitzchak knew that Eisav was a very earthly person. He also knew that his son Yaakov was entirely spiritual. However, Yitzchak had imagined that Eisav and Yaakov should have a partnership, similar to the classic Yissacher and Zevulun operating arrangement. In other words, Yaakov would sit in the *Beis Medrash* and be the spiritual personality of the family. Eisav – who was into materialism and matters of this world – would be the one who would provide for and sustain the spiritual endeavors of his brother.

Chazal say that Eisav wanted to impress upon his father that he was a very pious individual. Therefore, Eisav inquired of Yitzchak, "How does one take tithe from salt?" This is a real "*frume shaylah*" [pious inquiry]! However, out of all the "*frume shaylahs*" there are in the world, why did he pick this particular question? Why didn't he ask a *shaylah* about tying his shoelaces or something

like that?

The answer is that Eisav wanted to show his father how much charity he gave! Eisav knew that Yitzchak's plan was for him to support Yaakov. Therefore, Eisav tried to impress Yitzchak by showing him how meticulous he was in the area of giving charity and tithing his income.

However, the problem was that Eisav was not capable of being Yaakov's financial backer. Eisav was not capable of parting with his money. He was not capable of following through on a partnership between "This World" and the "Next World." Rivka did perceive Eisav's true nature and that was the point of difference between Yitzchak and Rivka regarding which son should be given the blessing of materialism. Yitzchak saw this as a Yissocher-Zevulun arrangement. Rivka realized that "this is never going to happen" and therefore somehow or another, Yaakov must receive the *brachos*.

The Chikrei Lev then cites a Medrash which says that whatever Hashem created in this world has a purpose. Dovid *HaMelech* said to the Almighty, "*Hashem*, everything you created in this world is good – except for insanity." In other words, Dovid felt that everything the Almighty created in the world had a legitimate purpose. However, he could not comprehend what could possibly be the purpose of a person being mentally deranged. What *tachlis* does the world have from a person who is literally crazy?

The Medrash continues, "The Master of the Universe said to Dovid – 'Dovid, you question the validity of insanity? By your life, you will yet need it.'" Indeed, there came a time when Dovid was running away from Shaul, and he was temporarily arrested by the soldiers of Achish, King of Gas. Dovid, who rightly anticipated he was in great danger that the Plishti [Philistine] king would exact revenge for his having killed Goliath, feigned insanity. When Achish saw the apparently insane individual brought before him, he concluded it could not possibly be the famous Jewish warrior, and let him go free. [Shmuel I 23:11-16]

Had this concept of insanity not existed – that some people are literally out of their mind – the king would not have known what to do with this drooling individual who was brought before him. Since there are crazy people in the world, Dovid was able to use this fact to disguise his true identity.

The point of the Medrash is that there is in fact no item or phenomenon or character trait created in this world that does not have some purpose or function in the Divine Plan.

If so, now we can understand something else: Who was Rivka, Yitzchak's wife? She was the daughter of Besuel and the sister of Lavan. The Medrash comments, "Her father was a cheater; her brother was a cheater. The people of her native town were all cheaters. Yet this righteous girl emerged from all of them. She was like a rose amidst the thorns." Rivka broke the mold.

Why did the *Ribono shel Olam* deem that the wife of Yitzchak needed to be a person who came from such a background – surrounded from birth by a bunch of crooks and thieves? The answer is that the One who knows what is going to happen in the future needed a person like Rivka for this very

moment. When Yitzchak is about to give the *Brachos* to Eisav, which would affect the entire future of the Jewish people, something had to be done to stop him. If his wife had been the type of person who never witnessed a crooked transaction her entire life, she would have no way to intervene and preempt her husband's intentions.

Fortunately, Rivka knew a thing or two about deception. "I remember my father; I remember my brother; I remember all the townspeople of Aram Naharaim. I know how to handle the situation!" She reached into the bag of tricks she learned in her father's house. And that is how she rescued the *brachos* for Yaakov.

Hashem knew exactly what was going to happen. This also explains why Yitzchak had to become blind. If he was not blind, this deception could have never happened.

Rivka never used her knowledge of deception before and she never used it again. However, there is a place and a time for everything. Just like Dovid had to learn the lesson that there is a place and time for *meshugaim* [crazy people] in the world, and we dare not doubt the Grand Plan of the *Ribono shel Olam*, so too when it came to Yitzchak's spouse – Hashem prepared for him a match that despite her apparently "inferior spiritual lineage" – is exactly who he needed as his *ezer k'negdo* [helpmate in life].

Rivka saw beyond her husband's "Grand Plan" that Eisav and Yaakov would form a "Yissocher-Zevulun" partnership. She knew that "it's not going to happen." She saw through the ruse of Eisav's pious questioning of his father regarding the tithing of salt. She knew that Yaakov, despite his totally spiritual essence, needed these material *brachos* – and she knew how to get them for him!

Rav Hutner once commented – every attribute is supposed to have a purpose. However, what if a person is "krum" (a Yiddish word meaning the opposite of straight)? What is the purpose of such a person – who simply cannot think straight? There is a concept of possessing "*sechel haYashar*" [a straight thinker]. That is a quality we can appreciate. But why did the *Ribono shel Olam* create people whose thought process is invariably crooked?

Rav Hutner says that this quality comes in handy in implementing the principle "Give every person the benefit of the doubt" (*hevi dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf zechus*) [Avos 1:6]. We look at a situation and we conclude, based on the evidence, that so-and-so is definitely guilty. Logically, we need to come to the conclusion that he is not innocent! So what do we need to do – we need to think "*krum*" [illogically] in order to give him "the benefit of the doubt." So, even "*krumkeit*" has a place in this world, in keeping with the idea that indeed there is a time and place for everything.

Basically, this is a piece of wisdom enunciated by Shlomo [Koheles Chapter 3]. There is a time for war and a time for peace, and so forth. There is a place for an insane person. There is even a place for deception and trickery. There is even a time to think crooked -- in order to give a person the benefit of the doubt.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Toldos is provided below:

- # 031 - Marriage Between Relatives
- # 073 - Non-Kosher Medicines and the Birchas Hareiach (Scents)
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- # 259 - "Sorfin Al Hachzakos": The Concept of Chazaka in Halacha
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