

## From the High School

continued from page 3

implication of the *passuk* at the beginning that describes him as simply being “*ayef*”, tired, from a long day in the field), why in the world would he trade his birthright as the first born and all of the blessing that comes with it for a bowl of soup? It seems unrealistic he would make such a deal.

Perhaps it is with these questions in mind that Rashi in his commentary on the *Chumash* quotes from the *Gemara* in *Masechet Sanhedrin* (22b), which gives an explanation for Eisav’s reasoning when he declared “Behold I am going to die” (Bereishit 25:32) before going ahead with the deal. Rashi explains that Yaakov told Eisav that being the firstborn would require him to work in the Beit Hamikdash, certainly an incredible merit and opportunity, but one that would come together with a multitude of responsibilities that he would have to fulfill. Upon learning this, Eisav declares that if I must be held to these standards, I would rather back out now and avoid putting myself in such a position where I will likely fail and potentially die as a result.

While this decision of Eisav might seem preposterous to us now, if we are truly honest with ourselves, we have to ask how much we may find this aspect of Eisav within each of us. Do we run to ask hard questions about our lives and our values, or do we avoid them because we are afraid of the answers we might find? Do we take responsibilities upon ourselves, or do we avoid responsibility because we are afraid of failure? Do we have the guts to face up to hard challenges of personal growth, or do we “sell our birthright” and give up on ourselves before we start because we are afraid of failure?

Indeed, Eisav did not simply make a bad deal because he did not read President Trump’s book well enough to guide him to make the deal properly. He made this deal out of an attitude of complacency and a fear of responsibility, issues that I am afraid many of us face as well. In the case of Eisav, the consequences were quite dire, and are felt to this very day. For us, it is imperative to look hard in the mirror and search out the Eisav in all of us. Are we avoiding responsibility in order to be comfortable and secure, or do we have the courage of Yaakov to jump into difficult responsibilities because we know that the rewards will be well worth the risks involved? It is imperative that we ask ourselves these hard questions rather than end up in a situation like Eisav’s, wherein we sacrifice so much, for miniscule, meaningless benefits.

- Rabbi Yaakov Mintz — HS, Talmud Chair

### Answers to questions on page 1

- (1) Red
- (2) His birthright
- (3) Goat skin
- (4) He was blind
- (5) Lavan’s

## Parshat Toldot

Friday, November 17, 2017

כה חשוך תשע"ה

### From the Lower School

1. What color was Eisav’s skin when he was born?
2. What did Eisav give to Yaakov in exchange for stew?
3. What did Yaakov put on his arms and neck so that he could trick Yitzchak?
4. Why couldn’t Yitzchak tell it was Yaakov?
5. To whose house did Yaakov run away?

— Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, JKHA Assistant Principal

### From the Middle School

#### Dimmed Vision

Yitzchak's failed sight is the focus of much commentary. The advent of his lost sight can be understood as merely a consequence of advanced age. Many commentators, however, find lessons and meaning behind Yitzchak's loss of vision.

In a well-known Midrash, cited by Rashi, Yitzchak's failed sight is attributed to tears of the angels who observed him while he waited helplessly to be killed at the *akeidah*. It was these tears, which fell into Yitzchak's eyes, that in his later years contributed to his failing eye-sight. Understood from a metaphoric perspective, the Midrash underscores Yitzchak's trauma at the *akeidah* and the sense of abandonment he must have felt. His childhood experience must have contributed to his perspective as a parent. Now in his later years, as a parent, his love is unconditional. Parental support for *his* son would never be in question. Despite Esav's dubious character and sullen behavior, his father's love for and commitment to him are immutable.

My father, Rabbi Schulem Rubin, z'l, was fond of offering an alternate interpretation. As parents our love for our children can be blinding and

Continued on page 2....

## From the Middle School

continued from page 1

obscure our objectivity. While at times it is healthier not to over analyze or express objections to children's developing character, we must endeavor to see our children's strengths and emergent strengths with clarity and acuity. Failing to see opportunities for intervention can have deleterious results in later years of children.

There are no packaged formulas or universal instructions for raising children and guiding them through their challenges. It is often difficult to determine what behaviors fall within the norm of healthy social and psychological development, when to be alarmed by a child's questionable behavior and when to consider it a normal manifestation of a passing stage. Religious education presents an additional challenge. Creating religious expectations and setting family religious standards are responsibilities we eagerly engage. But there can be a fine line for a teenage child between setting expectations and imposing religious coercion.

When looking at Yitzchak's parental perspective we should be empathetic about his predicament and understand that at some point while raising our children we will all have a Yitzchak moment.

— Rabbi Eliezer Rubin — Head of School

## From the High School

### The Request of A Tzaddik

In this week's *parsha*, *Toldot*, we read the words, "*Vaye'ater lo Hashem, vatahar Rivkah ishto*" (25:21). These words can literally be translated as "And Hashem was persuaded, and his [Yitzchak's] wife Rivka became pregnant." In the book *The Short Vort*, Rabbi Moshe Kormornick describes that one of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld's students was puzzled by this verse. He asked, why does the *passuk* seem to indicate that Hashem needed to be somewhat convinced before accepting Yitzchak's prayer and request for a child? The student was bothered that Yitzchak had to go through so much effort to get his request for a child accepted by Hashem. Surely the prayer from a *tzaddik* should be enough.

Rav Sonnenfeld answered his student with the following story from the life of the Chatam Sofer. There was once a righteous couple that lived close by to the Chatam Sofer. That couple had been experiencing a horrible, difficult labor. Unable to watch his wife's suffering continue for any longer, the husband ran to the home of the Chatam Sofer. The husband asked the Chatam Sofer to pray for an easy and quick labor, however, the Chatam Sofer apologetically declined. Without questioning or judging the Chatam Sofer's words, the husband ran back to his wife, and only after several more hours of

Continued on page 3....

## From the High School

continued from page 2

torture, they welcomed their new baby boy. After the mother and son had fallen asleep, the husband rushed back to the house of the Chatam Sofer to deliver the amazing news and ask him why he refused to daven for a speedy and easy delivery for his wife.

Delighted at the news of the baby boy's arrival, the Chatam Sofer explained his actions through a Gemara that states: "When Rebbe Akiva died, Rebbe was born. When Rebbe died, Rav Yehuda was born. When Rav Yehuda died, Rava was born. When Rava died, Rav Ashi was born. This *Gemara* teaches us that a *tzaddik* is not taken from the world until a *tzaddik* like him is born." The Chatam Sofer explained to the new father that since he and his wife were so righteous, their son was bound to be righteous as well. Therefore, if the Chatam Sofer would have davened for a quick labor, he would have undoubtedly been praying for a quick death of another *tzaddik* somewhere else in the world.

With this story, Rav Sonnenfeld explained why Hashem was unwilling to grant Yitzchak a child at first. We are told that Avraham died five years before his predetermined death so that he would not live to see his grandchild Esav and his evil ways. Furthermore, the sooner Yitzchak's son Esav was born, the sooner that Avraham would have to die. This explains why Hashem had to be specifically persuaded to allow Yitzchak's son Esav to be born, as He did not want to cut Avraham's life too short.

Rav Yosef Chaim goes on to explain that the phrase, "*Vaye'ater lo Hashem, vatahar Rivkah ishto*" has the same gematria of the words "*chamesh shanim*," "five years." This hints to us that the five years that Hashem would cut short from Avraham's life were due to the birth of Yitzchak's son, Esav.

- Tommi Ratzker is a Freshman at RKYHS

### A Really Bad Deal

When we consider some of the worst deals of all time - what exactly comes to mind? Those who are into American history might think about the purchase of Alaska for \$7.2 million dollars; sports fans might think of the famous Herschel Walker deal; and those of us into current events might think of the Iran Nuclear Agreement, which, according to Prime Minister Netanyahu "is bad in every aspect."

Yet, even considering all of these examples. We are left puzzled when we consider the deal that Eisav makes with Yaakov in this week's *parsha*. Eisav was known to be slick and conniving, and so it really leaves us to wonder how it is possible that he fell for such a deal. A bowl of soup for the eternal birthrights? Come on! Unless Eisav was literally starving (and that is not the

Continued on page 4....