Chomer Lidrush

Some ideas to turn your gears heading into Parshas Toldos.

Becoming, Not Arriving

This week's original original *derasha* starts from a Rashi that seems backwards (and has always bothered me!). Hashem answered Yitzchak, "*lo,” - him –“ v'lo lah*" (25:21), because the *tefillah* of a *tzaddik ben tzaddik* outweighs that of a *tzaddik ben rasha*. But Rivka, raised among *resha'im*, is a *ba'alas teshuvah*; shouldn't her *tefillah* count for more?

Rav Moshe Sternbuch, in *A Voice in the Darkness* (adapted by R. Daniel Yaakov Travis), offers two answers.

1. Yitzchak was ultimately davening for Avraham's grandchild, so his *tefillah* carried the *zechus* of Avraham.
2. Yitzchak was a *ba'al teshuvah* too! Rav Saadya Gaon, after an innkeeper begged forgiveness for failing to recognize him, did *teshuvah* every day for yesterday's *avodah* in light of today's deeper understanding, and Yitzchak kept outgrowing his own earlier service in the same way.

Rav Chaim Shaul Kaufman zt"l, in *Mishchas Shemen*, sees the idea in the births themselves: Esav came out "*asui*," finished, while Yaakov came out an ordinary infant, because "*adam le'amal yulad*" (Iyov 5:7). Esav, sure he was born complete, felt no need for a *bris*. As the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehuda Ze'ev Segal, put it, making a golem is no trick; the trick is making the golem into a *ben adam*. A religious upbringing is a gift, not an exemption, and even the *tzaddik ben tzaddik* spent his life becoming.