

SHABBAT LASHEM

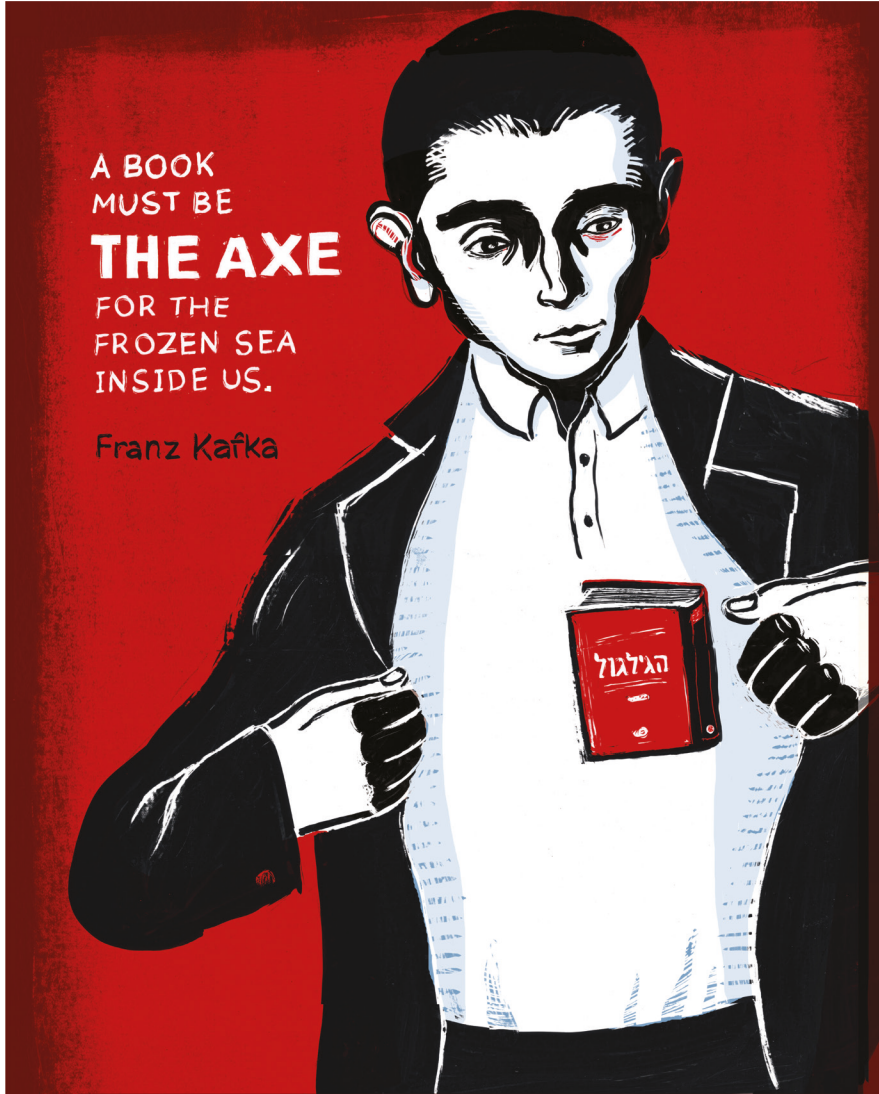
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PARASHAT TOLDOT

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ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL



RAV AHARON HERSKOVITZ | RAV SHALIACH

In this week's parasha, we are told of the birth of Yaakov and Esav, twins who grow up and seem to be as different from each other as possible. The Torah highlights these differences by stating (Bereishit 25:27):

ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם יושב אוהלים - The boys grew up, and Esav was a man who knew how to hunt, a man of the field; Yaakov was a single-minded man and sat in tents.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 63:10) notes that the Torah highlights the differences between the two specifically when “the boys grew up”, and states as follows:

And the boys grew up (Genesis 25:27): Rabbi Levi said, “There is a [relevant] parable about a myrtle and a wild thorn bush growing one on top of the other. And once they grew and blossomed, this one gives its fragrance, and this one its thorn. So [too,] all of the thirteen years they would both walk to the school and they would both come [back] from the school. After thirteen years, this one would walk

to the study halls, and this one would walk to the house of idolatry.”

One reading of this midrash is that Yaakov and Esav were fundamentally different; Esav was always destined to go “off the derech”. After all, he was a thorn bush! **At the beginning of their lives, the differences between the two were muted or masked, and those who knew them would be hard-pressed to differentiate between the two. Only when their personalities became more pronounced was it clear how different they were.** Yaakov and Esav became different adults with different life paths and these differences were inborn. In psychology, this would be referred to as the “nature” side of the nature vs. nurture debate: a prickly, damaging and hurtful adult thorn bush exists because that’s what its genetic code is telling to be.

However, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch has a different understanding of this midrash. It’s true that Yaakov and Esav had different temperaments, personalities and genetic makeups; after all, that’s clearly evident from the moment they are born! However, the stage of life in which



Pictured: Salford Bnei Akiva, groups Zeraim and Ma'lot had an amazing time painting boards for their rooms!

both attended the same school for thirteen years is not intended to highlight that during that period they were not different, but to explain why they grew up to become so different. **In other words, Yaakov and Esav were taught and raised in the exact same way, without accounting for the vast differences in their personalities.** Although the educational approach offered in this “school” benefitted Yaakov, allowing him to blossom personally and spiritually, it was quite the opposite of what was needed for Esav, the active, agile and energetic child.

Rav Hirsch points out that the two needed to be raised according to the verse in Mishlei (22:6): חנוך לנער על פי דרכו: **“Educate the youngster according to his way”**, which would mean “that each child must be treated differently, with an eye to the slumbering tendencies of his nature, and out of them, be educated to develop his special characteristics for the one pure human and Jewish life.” Esav’s tendencies

were those of an איש יודע ציד, one who knew how to hunt, in other words: he was crafty, knowing when to appear one way whilst concurrently crafting alternative plans and ideas. These tendencies could have helped him develop in the world of diplomacy. Theoretically, Yaakov and Esav’s different strengths could have been used complementarily, allowing them to “have remained twin-brothers in spirit and life” instead of causing the historical tension between the nations.

This lesson is important for us as parents and peers, as madrichim and educators: **our goal is not to take vastly different individuals under our care and force them into one sharply-delineated form. Our goals and approaches need to be attuned to people’s innate differences,** together with the understanding that the service of Hashem is possible both for the ‘single-minded’ and for those who ‘understand hunting’. Shabbat Shalom.

DVAR HALACHA: WEEKLY QUESTION

Have a question? Please email rav@bauk.org or call Rav Aharon at 07976642135.

Question: My family is going away with a group of families to a site for Shabbat. We’ll each be staying in separate rooms and eating together. Where should we light candles?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch paskens (263:6) that yeshiva students who leave home are required to light candles in the place they are sleeping and make a bracha there. The Mishnah Berurah (29) stresses that this is true even if the room is designated only as a place to sleep in,

and the student will be eating elsewhere. According to this logic, when a group of people are staying at a hotel or similar place, the Shemirat Shabbat KiHilchata (45:9) advises one woman to light in the communal eating space, and all others to light in their rooms with a bracha. However, the custom is for all women to light with a bracha in the communal dining room, and this is what is required by most sites due to safety reasons. In that situation, a woman should also turn on a light in her room and have in mind that it be part of her obligation for Shabbat candle lighting, but only make the bracha in the dining room.

AVRAHAM, YITZCHAK, JACOB : CHOSENNESS, BLINDNESS, LOVE, AND DIGGING WELLS

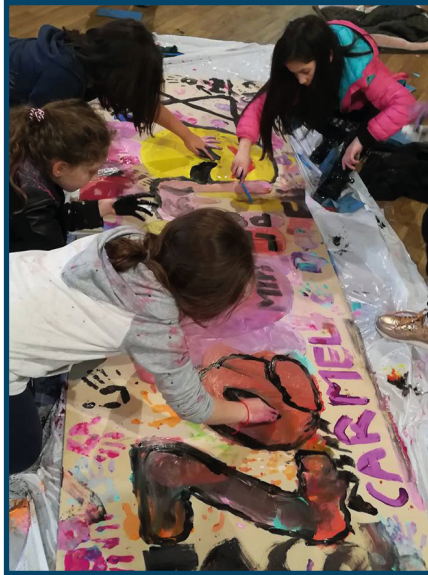
ARIEL COHEN | BOGER DVAR TORAH

One of the most important themes of Genesis is the matter of divine chosenness, and the story of the sale of the birthright is one of the oddest cases of this in the Torah.

There can be no doubt that chosenness has deep psychological consequences on both sides of the equation, and throughout Genesis we grapple with the question of who is chosen. Whilst Rabbi Sacks argues that to be chosen does not mean that others are unchosen, and that to be secure in one's relationship with God does not depend on negating the possibility that others may have a different relationship with him, Genesis teaches us that the fact of being born eldest does not mean the right to the firstborn blessing.

God's blessing is given on the basis of merit and not chronology: In Genesis where the choice concerns the representative of God's way in the world, there is no preference for the biological firstborn, but rather God chooses the person who is most worthy. By observing Jacob, who is interested in the true birthright which is divine chosenness, we see that the birthright can be bought. That one can acquire the leadership of the family, representing the continuation of the path of Abraham and Isaac, the right to "guard

and preserve the path of God, to perform righteousness and justice", testifies to the fact that being born in a certain way doesn't automatically make a person worthy of receiving God's blessing. To receive God's blessing, we must be spiritually suited and worthy, we must invest effort, and we must seek to "acquire" our true birthright.



Turning now to Jacob's father, it's written that "when Isaac grew old, his eyes weakened from seeing" (27:1). Isaac undoubtedly had trouble seeing, indeed the deception of Jacob in order to obtain the berakhot depends upon it, but it is tempting to interpret his blindness as not just physical but also a perceptual, spiritual inability to distinguish:

for instance, to distinguish between Jacob and Esau, and not only in the form of their faces. **How is it that Isaac loved and favoured Esau, when we assume that he was unworthy of this preference?** The answer is that he was blind, for some reason unperceptive, indiscriminating, and thus easily fooled. In explaining why it was that Isaac was not attuned to the world around him, the Midrash in Bereishit Rabba 65:9 cites several explanations. Since the phrase "from seeing" is unnecessary, the Midrash

elects to understand it as causative, rather than being a modifying characteristic of his blindness: either Isaac whilst bound upon the altar looked up and saw into the heavens where the angels were weeping the tears seared his eyes leading to late onset blindness, or when Isaac saw the glory of the celestial throne it resulted in blindness.

Both Midrashim are referring to spiritual blindness rather than physical blindness, both are describing an experience which reorients Isaac's perception, a tendency which increases with age and eventually will be reflected in his physical blindness too.

In attempting to explain the midrashim, we must consider that Isaac's binding was the formative experience in his life: it is clear that the result of the binding is that the heightened spiritual sensitivity that renders him unable to make hard nosed distinctions in the mundane world.

Isaac's mind is directed upward and inward: his field is depth of experience rather than practical living. Indeed, Isaac did not engage in remodelling his external world, his experiences were inward and contemplative. This is clearly shown in one episode in Isaac's biblical biography (repeated twice), that of digging wells. Isaac doesn't conquer new heights but he deepens the achievements of the past. Whilst he is digging wells in Israel, he is redigging the wells of Abraham. After Abraham, who climbed to pinnacle of Mt Moriah, spiritual development requires introspection: "lasuah basadeh" (24:63), wandering through the field, and Isaac, in his all-encompassing fixation on the

throne of glory, was the one to do that. The great achievements of Abraham would dissipate - the wells would have become filled in - had Isaac not returned to deepen them, foregoing the advance into new areas in order to solidify what had been gained already.

Turning finally to Abraham, looking at the Midrash: "Abraham had a righteous son and a wicked son, and likewise Isaac", it's natural to consider what the difference was between Abraham's attitude towards Ishmael and Isaac's attitude towards Esau. Whilst the Torah doesn't record any conversations between Abraham and Ishmael, contrastingly Isaac reveals his love for Esau from the outset: "Isaac loved Esau" (25:28), and did not change his parenting course once aware of his son's true character.



In the Midrash HaGadol it is argued that Isaac showed love for Esau in order to draw him closer:

"for if, when he loved him, Esau's actions were evil, how much more evil would they be if he hated him and distanced him."

Beautifully the Midrash quotes our sages: "The right hand should always draw near and the left hand push away. Therefore the Torah says that Isaac loved Esau". Isaac teaches us that one's interactions with those, in this case a son, who have deviated from the path must come from love. Only through love are we able to repair, even a little, the way of the wayward one.

Shabbat Shalom and have a lovely week.



COVER IMAGE DISCUSSION | THINKER: FRANZ KAFKA

Every six weeks for the coming year the Choveret will be a special bumper issue where we showcase some of the amazing art created for the Voices and Visions project. **The project is about using art combined with powerful messages to start conversations about Jewish identity.** Each of the pieces has been specially created for the project and is accompanied by a commentary text, biographies of the thinker and artist and questions to prompt discussion with family and friends.

Can you ever forget the times when your heart leapt into your throat as you read a riveting book for the first time? When was the last time a book shattered your world, completely altering your perspective? And how many times have your ploughed through endless pages of text, only to realize you barely remember any of it? **Sometimes books thaw out our insides; sometimes they allow us to hide within our own boredom and alienation.**

Franz Kafka was an early-twentieth century, German-language Jewish author. Inside each of us, says Kafka, is a frigid core. We can easily become set in our ways and numb to the outside world. Only an axe can shatter the most hardened surfaces, such as thick ice. When the frozen surface is not simply a sea, but a human soul, we need books to break open our calcified hearts. Only words of critique and rebuke will effectively free the living waters that run beneath.

This image is harsh, even violent. But the notion that words have the power to change the world is an old idea, and a

very Jewish one. In Tehillim 147:18, the Psalmist speaks of how divine words melt the snow that blankets the earth. This softer image of melting offers a gentler perspective on the power of words. Words can break us, as in Kafka's image. But they can also warm us and melt our frozen hearts, releasing energy and potential from within that can, in turn, warm others.

About the Author: FRANZ KAFKA (1883-1924) was an author and writer whose novels explore the human struggle for understanding. Kafka studied law at the University of Prague, worked in insurance and wrote novels. He later moved to Berlin

to focus on his writing, but published very little during his lifetime. After Kafka's passing, his friend Max Brod published many of Kafka's novels and stories and earned Kafka his place among the great writers of German literature. Kafka suffered from depression and anxiety, and these heavy emotions are echoed in his stories and characters.



About the Artist: ORIT BERGMAN is an Israeli writer and illustrator, and instructor of illustration and design at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. Berman studied at Bezalel and at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She writes and illustrates children's books, several of which have been translated, and frequently contributes illustrations to newspapers, magazines, advertisement campaigns and exhibitions. Bergman also does set design and illustrations for theatre, including performances of some of her own books.

Look back at the cover image on this week's Shabbat Lashem:

What do you SEE?

1. How does the high contrast, black and white formal clothing help reinforce the idea in the quote? What meaning can you infer from the use and placement of the colour red?
2. By the demeanour and actions of the man, what do you think he is trying to portray in support of the quote? Does knowing that the man is Kafka change your experience of the poster?
3. The book the man reveals is called HaGilgul – Hebrew for Kafka's book, Metamorphosis – how does that contribute to the image?

What do you THINK?

1. What is the last book you read that had the effect on you that Kafka is describing here?
2. What frozen seas do you have inside you? What does the image of an axe breaking the frozen sea suggest to you? What happens after the axe breaks the frozen sea? How is it a metaphor for a good book?
3. In the larger context of this quote, Kafka says we should "read only the kind of books that wound or stab us." Do you agree? What other kind of books do you read and why?

COMMUNITY UPDATES

SVIVOT NEWS

Woodside Park Bnei Akiva - Roshim: Jordan and Ronnie Passe

Woodside Park Bnei Akiva is going great this year; with a team of two Roshim, two Sganim and six Madrichim who truly ensure that the chanichim have both an enjoyable and educational time on a Shabbat afternoon.

We started off the year with our annual sucah-crawl, visiting three generous hosts from the community and this Sviva has gone from strength to strength ever since. Furthermore we have seen a regularly increasing number of new chanichim coming on a regular basis - a tribute to the stellar work of our dedicated Tzevet - which we hope to see continue as the year progresses.

EVENTS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Full details of all our events are available on our Facebook page, or call the Bayit on 020 8209 1319 to speak to one of the team.

Leil Iyun (a lecture series for Bogrim) starts on the **20th November** on the topic of "Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People" by Ran Bar-Yehoshafat from the Kohelet Policy Forum in Israel.

Bet Midrash (formerly Limmud) starts on the **22nd November at 19:00** for schools years 7-13 with Chaburot given by Bogrim. **Contact eli@bauk.org for more info.**

Shabbat Bogrim is the 24rd and 25th of November. **For more information contact hannah@bauk.org.**



SHIRA HERSKOVITZ | RABBANIT SHLICHA

Each morning we begin our day with gratitude. Before we even get out of bed we say “מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקים שהחזרת בי” נשמתי בחמלה רבה אמונתך You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”

Upon opening our eyes and regaining consciousness and awareness, **we take a moment to acknowledge that we are only here due to God's kindness.** We thank God for deciding that we are worthy of another day on this earth. The last words of the prayer are meant to be said as a separate clause: “Rabbah Emunatecha,” “Great is your faith.” The question begs asking: who's faith is being defined as being great? Ours, or God's? **Rashi suggests that the faith being discussed is our faith in God. Every night we go to sleep, having faith in that God will return our soul to us and allow us to awaken.** We go to sleep without thinking twice that we will wake up in the morning, not doubting God's act of kindness of giving us an additional day.

While this approach is important, the Chatam Sofer offers a different take, one that provides a fascinating insight. According to the Chatam Sofer the clause does not refer to our faith in God, but to God's faith in us. **Each morning, God has faith that we will do something meaningful and productive with our day. Due to this 'belief' in us, God entrusts our soul to us for another day.** Even if we may have sinned yesterday, squandering the

opportunities presented to us, God has faith in us and our ability to change. If we wake up each morning with the thought that we were put on this earth for a reason, think of what we can accomplish! When we say the Modeh Ani, it's more than thanking God. It's taking a moment to meditate on the idea that we are here for a greater purpose.

I recently read a fascinating story that relates to Modeh Ani. There was a conference of neuroscience many years ago, and one of the issues discussed was the phenomenon of a group of people who would faint after waking up. **One researcher, Prof. Linda McMaron, gave a lecture on her study that the fainting is caused by the quick flow of blood to the brain when people get up too quickly. She recommended 12 seconds of sitting in bed before getting up to avoid any fainting or dizziness.** Another professor at the conference who was Jewish pointed out that there is a twelve word Jewish prayer said each morning. The prayer takes twelve seconds to say, if each word is focused on: “Modeh...ani... lefanecha...”

Each morning we pause, take a moment to reflect on why we are here, what we are going to do with this gift of life that we were given and Who we have to thank for it all. **Twelve seconds to frame our day in the right way to ensure we set out on the right path as we start our day with purpose.**

