



# Of Traps and Trappings

As the story of Yitzchak's twin sons begins to unfold, the Torah portrays Yitzchak's particular affection for his older son Esav (Genesis 25:28). Rashi cites the Midrash which suggests that this preferential love was misguided, based as it was on a lie. Esav deceived his father and led him to believe that he was righteous and observed God's commandments with utmost meticulousness. The same way Esav trapped game with his hands, he entrapped Yitzchak with his words.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous exegetes, however, have not adopted this classic approach, and Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook develops a unique perspective in his *Midbar Shur*.<sup>2</sup>

Rav Kook examines the essence of Esav and Yaakov as reflected in their names. Esav comes from the verb *asah*, "he made"; Esav was "ready-made" at birth, full of vim and vigor. He therefore represents raw power and dominion on earth. Yaakov derives from the noun *akev*, "heel," the lowest part of the body on which we step. He is a symbol of humility and meekness. Accordingly, Esav

is a "man of the field," while Yaakov is a "dweller in tents" (Genesis 25:27).

Contrary to Rashi, Rav Kook contends that Yitzchak was never fooled by Esav and knew full well Esav's true character and conduct. Why, then, did he prefer that Esav receive the coveted blessing?



In order to answer this, we must enter Yitzchak's frame of mind. He is cognizant of the fact that he is not only father to two young men, but patriarch of a nation. He is acutely aware of his role as the pro-

genitor of a people who will someday be as numerous as the stars, a people who will need Esav's brand of forcefulness to conquer and defend their God-given land. The Jewish people will inevitably make enemies and need "men of the field" of battle to ensure their physical survival. Does not Esav's aggressiveness and use of force have a place in the overall makeup of the Jew?

On the face of it, Yitzchak's analysis is sound. But there is one caveat. Rav Kook posits that force is a last resort; aggression cannot be at the foundation or at the core of the Jewish personality. They are never to be embedded in the Jewish soul. The Children of Israel are compassionate, sensitive,

1. Rashi on Genesis 25:28.

2. *Midbar Shur*, *derush* 29.

and kind.<sup>3</sup> If and when these rougher traits are adopted, they must remain ancillary and only on the surface. Never can we allow aggression to seep in and corrupt the pure inner soul of the Jewish people.

When Yaakov enters the tent to receive the blessing Yitzchak intended for Esav, he conceals his skin with hair to mimic hirsute Esav. Rav Kook emphasizes that Yaakov is merely wearing these on his arms and neck for outward appearances. They are the trappings of Esav. The Jewish adoption of Esav's traits goes only second-skin-deep, and they are to be used by the Jew only when circumstances demand it.

This principle is so integral to Jewish life that Halachah actually codifies this notion. Strikingly, in the section of Rabbi Yosef Caro's monumental halachic code *Shulchan Aruch* that deals with determining Jewish lineage, it states that we may question the veracity of an individual's Jewish lineage if that person does not exhibit the traits of compassion and kindness.<sup>4</sup>

Rav Kook believed in the goodness of mankind. He was convinced that we strive to be good because we are good. His unique perspective on this fateful episode involving Yitzchak and Esav reminds us that compassion and gentleness define us, and that in every aspect of our lives we should feel and exhibit kindness, sympathy and sensitivity. ■

3. *Yevamot* 79b.

4. *Shulchan Aruch, Even ha-Ezer*, 2:2.

**Rabbi Goldscheider** is the author of the newly published book 'Torah United' (OU Press), featuring divrei Torah on the weekly parasha from Rav Kook, Rabbi Solovetichik, and the Chassidic Masters.

נס"ד



You  
Are  
Unique

And so are your  
life's challenges.

Therapy can help  
you navigate the maze

The Family Institute of Neve Yerushalayim's post graduate clinical training program in Har Nof offers caring, professional help and support with your life's most pressing issues. We provide subsidized therapy for:

Individuals | Couples  
Families | Children  
Trauma | Intimate Abuse

We now offer the option of 3-5 sessions free of charge with one of our trauma informed alumni for those looking for support related to current war.

☎ 02-654-4600

☎ 055-928-6050

✉ [familyinstitute@nevev.org](mailto:familyinstitute@nevev.org)

🌐 [www.nevefamilyinstitute.org](http://www.nevefamilyinstitute.org)

המכון  
למשפחה  
של נוה ירושלים



THE  
FAMILY  
INSTITUTE  
OF NEVE YERUSHALAYIM