

TOLEDOT: Genesis 25:19-28:9  
HAFTARAH: Malachi 1:1-2:7

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

*... THE HOME: Bereft of his mother, Isaac found solace in Rebekah: "Isaac brought Rebekah to the tent, saw in her the image of Sarah, his mother, married and loved her; so Isaac found comfort in his grief for his mother." (Gen. 24:67, Rashi) Now, the dwelling-tent became, as in Sarah's days, a true home, marked by an everlasting light within, blessed with over-flowing generosity, and surrounded with divine glory (Midrash). This became, in Judaism, the model of a family home, where love, goodness and holiness grow — a living sanctuary of human joy and fulfillment.*

### Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ISAAC was a survivor. And a victim. Rescued alive from his *Akeda*, he remained forever a living sacrifice, a *korban*, detached from reality, marred by self-deception and delusion, “blind” to recognize the real nature of his twin sons. As he grew older “his eyes became dim” (27:1)—his metaphoric “blindness” now becoming literal. In the poetic imagery of the Midrash: “When Isaac lay bound on the altar, ready to be sacrificed, the angels from heaven wept over him. Their flowing, boiling tears flooded his eyes—dimming his eyesight.” From his traumatic experience of the *Akeda* Isaac emerged a different person. His insight and outlook, his perception of reality—his “eyes”—were irreversibly touched. A Holocaust survivor carries within himself his altar—forever!

### **Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT FOR A POT OF LENTILS, as Esau did (Gen. 25:29-34), dramatizes a common human trait: preferring material gains over spiritual attainments, surrendering rank for food. The birthright ("bekhora") signifies in Torah a high level of distinction and responsibility; in the patriarchal society of antiquity the firstborn ("bekhor") was charged with political and religious leadership, combining the roles of king and priest. In sharp contrast to eminent birthright, the "pot of lentils" is a vivid symbol of vulgar gluttony, offering just a fleeting moment of gratification. But despising the nobility of birthright and seeking the satiation of his unbridled appetite, Esau traded the former for the latter. How often do we sacrifice our personal dignity, in our constant pursuit of elusive happiness ("pot of lentils")! In order to retain our inborn supremacy ("bekhora")--we must appreciate it!

Friday, December 1, 1989

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"GO AWAY!" Isaac's people were at first welcomed to the land of the Philistines, and their King Abimelekh offered them royal protection (Gen. 26:11). But when Isaac became successful and wealthy, the Philistines grew jealous and hostile. They plugged up all the wells of the Hebrew newcomers with dirt. Consequently Abimelekh urged them to leave (16): "Go away from us! You have become stronger than us!"

The Hebrew conveys an additional, more poignant implication: You derived your strength "*from us*" (*mimenu*): Your wealth is because of us and at our expense! A typical accusation. Jewish economic success is grudgingly viewed as sheer exploitation. As long as the Jew remains helpless and poor, he may get some sympathy. The moment he emerges victorious and mighty, he is harassed and expelled.

## Thought of the Week

---

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JACOB'S KISS, upon first meeting Rachel, overflowed with emotion (Gen. 29:11), "Jacob kissed Rachel, and loudly wept . . ." A cry of joy or sadness? A spontaneous or deliberate kiss? *Midrash*, BR 70:12: "All kisses are sensual, except: (1) kiss of reverence; (2) kiss of reunion; (3) kiss of separation; and (4) kiss of kinship." The list is partial; kisses may express a complexity of feelings, from bursting lust to placid duty. Jacob's kiss was more than just a kiss of kinship.

Gallantly and lovingly, Jacob first rolled the heavy cover from the well and watered Rachel's flock; then, he kissed her. The verbs for watering and kissing sound alike: ("vayashk" and "vayishak"); is it a hint of correlation? Jacob's was a kiss of mystery.

## Thought of the Week

---

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BERAKHAH and BEKHORAH (blessing and birthright) are two dominant themes in the ongoing rivalry between the twins, Jacob and Esau. These two terms, composed of the same Hebrew letters, are correlated. Both terms are three-dimensional: Biblical blessing (*berakhah*) entails wishing, giving, and envisioning; it is a wish, invoking divine favor by greeting or prayer; a gift, conferring or bequeathing rank or property; and a prophetic vision of the future. The birthright (*bekhorah*) of the first-born son in antiquity included three privileges: In estate, to a double inheritance; in worship, to serve as family priest; in leadership, to rule as king of the family. Jacob gained both, *berakhah* and *bekhorah* — prefiguring and symbolizing Jewish destiny.

Friday, November 16, 1990

---

## HE WEEK

---

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

SELLING THE BIRTHRIGHT for a pot of lentils, as Esau did (Genesis 25:29-34), dramatizes a common human trait: preferring ephemeral material gains over enduring spiritual attainments, surrendering rank for food. In patriarchal society of antiquity, the birthright (*bekhora*) signified a high level of distinction and responsibility; the first born (*bekhor*) was charged with political and religious leadership, combining the roles of king and priest. The pot of lentils (*nezid adashim*) serves as symbol for the gluttony of a starving person. Despising the nobility of birthright, and seeking the instant gratification of his impulsive appetite, Esau traded the former for the latter. In our constant pursuit of elusive happiness, how much do we sacrifice of our personal dignity? In order to retain our *bekhora* – our spiritual supremacy, our innate human dignity, our personal-moral stature – we must first of all appreciate it, cherishing it even more than material assets!

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

PARENTS' PREFERENTIAL LOVE, a recurrent theme in Genesis, is strikingly illustrated in the lives of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. Esau was a skillful hunter, who lived in the open; Jacob was a reserved person, who kept to his tents (Gen. 25:28). "Now Isaac loved Esau, for he provided game for his mouth; Rebekah, however, had always loved Jacob." This verse gives a reason for Isaac's love for his favored son, but not for Rebekah's. The Sages teach us that love that has no reason is stronger than love that has. Thus, the Hebrew verb describing Rebekah's love (*ohevet*), in the present-continuous tense, indicates deeper and more rooted love than the *berg* (*va-ye-ehav*), used to describe Isaac's love. The reason given for Isaac's preferential love is that Esau brought food from animals of which Isaac was fond. The mother's love, however, for her preferred son, Jacob, was not dependent on any external appeal, or on his lifestyle. It was unconditional--the strongest form of love.

**Candlelight time 4:41 Sabbath ends 5:33**  
**Scriptural reading for Saturday, Nov. 28:**  
**TOLEDOT: Genesis 25:19-28:9**

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE VOICE AND THE HANDS (Gen. 27:22): *"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau!"* These words of Isaac about his two sons have a prophetic ring: As metaphors, the "voice" indicates wisdom and spirituality and the "hands" force and aggression. The "voice" is Israel's (Jacob's) excellence; the "hands" are the oppressive weapons of the nations (Esau). Israel is destined to prevail only by the power of its "voice" and not its "hands" -- by its intellectual and moral superiority, by communicating its convictions and ideas, and not by brute force.

The violent "hands" of the nations (Esau) against Israel (Jacob) can be halted only with Israel's "voice" of Torah. When this "voice" is silent, the "hands" of oppression reign supreme; when it is heard, they wither (*Midrash*).

## RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

UNIVERSAL WORSHIP: Malachi, last of Israel's prophets (c. 450 B.C.E.), declares: "From sunrise to sunset, (God's) name is exalted among the nations!" (1:11). This phrase comprises both time and space, meaning that always and everywhere, God's glory is proclaimed.

In reality, however, in the time of Malachi, paganism was rampant, Zoroastrianism widespread, and only the Jewish people professed pure monotheism. Yet, the prophet recognizes in the various heathen cults of his day, a genuine quest for the true God, and an authentic adoration of the Supreme One (Talmud Bavli Menahot 110a).

The Jewish medieval poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol (11th-century Spain) expresses this idea in his "Crown of Glory" (*Keter-Malkhut*) hymn, singing to the One God:

*Your glory is not diminished,  
By worshippers of gods other than You;  
For the intention of them all  
Is to reach You.*

Judaism teaches us to respect all other religions and appreciate the diversity of human religious expression. Judaism is the true religion for Jews, as Christianity is for Christians and Islam for Muslims. "For let all people walk each in the name of its gods, and we will walk in the name of *Hashem* our God for ever and ever!" (Micah 4:5).

## THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

58 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / NOVEMBER 12, 1999

### RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

**HOW DOES JUDAISM RELATE TO OTHER RELIGIONS?** Judaism relates to other religions with due respect and appreciation. Jews – chosen by God in a special covenant to be *am segula* (a treasured people) – must follow higher standards of faith. Jews are ordained by Torah to adhere to pure monotheism. A Jew who entertains any notion of a “God” who reigns together with other deities – either in a dualistic form (like Zoroastrianism), or a triune form (like the Trinity in Christianity) – both called *shituf* in Hebrew – is considered *avoda zara*, idolatrous. However, according to the opinion of medieval Ashkenazic sages (not shared by Maimonides), for non-Jews who are ruled by the seven Noachide *mitzvot* that includes prohibition against idolatry, *shituf* – whether dualism or trinitarianism – is not forbidden.

The abhorrence of the prophets of Israel against paganism was based not on their distaste

for paganism’s strange theology but on the social and sexual immorality deeply rooted in pagan ritual. When Jonah prophesied in Nineveh – a most idolatrous city in the ancient world – he did not preach against polytheism, but against thievery.

Universal worship: Malachi, last of Israel’s prophets (c. 450 BCE), declares: “From sunrise to sunset (God’s) name is exalted among the nations!” (1:11). Namely: Each moment and in all places – “from morning to evening” and “from east to west” – God’s name is revered among all people, and pure offerings are presented in God’s honor.

In Malachi’s time paganism was rampant, Zoroastrianism widespread, and no other society, except the Jews, professed monotheism. Yet, the prophet recognizes in the various heathen cults of his day a noble human quality: genuine quest for and true adoration of the Supreme One (*Talmud Bavli Menahot* 110a).

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning. Nov. 8:

TOLEDOT: Genesis 25:19-28:9

HAFTARAH: Malachi 1:1-2:7

---

*Thought of the Week*

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

“THE VOICE IS THE VOICE OF JACOB, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” This proclamation uttered by Isaac (Gen. 27:22) after touching Jacob’s hand, which were deceptively covered with hairy skin, yields a symbolic-eternal meaning: The “voice” refers to spiritual virtue – the voice of study and prayer; the “hands” to physical force – the hands of tyranny and violence. The “voice” – not the “hands” – is the hallmark of Judaism (Jacob). When the “voice” of Judaism is dominant, then the “hands” of the enemy (Esau) are not. The secret of Judaism’s survival and victory is in the power of its “voice;” its excellence in spirit.

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

THE IDEAL TEACHER of Torah is compared to a "malach" of God (Ma. 2:7). The Hebrew term has a double meaning: angel and messenger. In the eyes of his students, he is an angel; in his own eyes, a messenger. For the students to be motivated to seek wisdom from their teacher, they must highly respect him – overlook his human failures and be enchanted by his "angelic" qualities, his dedication, integrity and patience. For the teacher to be inspired to share wisdom with his students, he must be imbued with a sense of mission – regard himself as "messenger," transmitting the heritage of the past to the generations of the future and enriching the present with a pertinent message of God. Teaching Torah is a sacred task. In many respects, the teacher is considered more important in a person's life than his parents. Parents give birth biologically; the teacher, spiritually. Parents provide temporal life; the teacher, eternal life. By his students, a teacher must be shown divine reverence: "Revere your teacher as you revere Heaven." Toward his students, a teacher must show human sensitivity: "A pedant is no teacher." (Avot. 4:12; 2:5). The teacher's role as a messenger involves responsibility to the students: "To withhold a detail of Torah from a student is to rob him of his inheritance." (San. 91b). The teacher must be treated as an angel but work as a messenger.

**Thought of the Week**

**By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

A PEACE TREATY between Abraham and Abimelech (king of Philistia), settling water disputes in the arid Negev, was duly solemnized by an oath on seven sheep in Beer-Sheba (meaning: Well of "Oath" or "Seven"). All the same, soon after the Patriarch died, the Philistines ignored the treaty, destroyed his old wells and disrupted the digging of new ones. Thus Isaac had to renew the treaty (Gen. 21 & 26). This ancient alliance with the undeserving and treacherous Philistines, contrived and initiated by them, was disastrous for us. It compromised Jewish strength and growth. Jacob, on his part, in order to avoid any further entanglement, stayed away from the Philistines altogether. This peace treaty, whereby the people abdicated their own rights and recognized non-existent "rights" of others, was dead wrong. The Midrash ominously points to tragic results: It caused the delay of Jewish settlement for many generations; the slaying of many Jewish heroes; the desecration of many holy places. To confirm false rights is as destructive as to deny true rights.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Nov. 12:

**TOLDOTH:** Genesis 25:19-28:9

**HAFTARAH:** Malachi 1:1-2:7

### Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL—everlasting and unshakable—is a fundamental doctrine of Jewish prophecy. The expression used by the last of the prophets, Malachi, conveying the words of God to His people, is (1:2): “ahavti etchem!” The common English translation of this phrase (“I have loved you”) somehow distorts its original, pristine meaning. The grammatical form of the verb is not past but perfect tense. The true translation of the prophetic expression in the name of God to Israel is: “I love you perfectly and without reservation.” God’s love for His people is complete, sublime and enduring forever. But this divine love, secured as it is, is also demanding. God’s love for Israel is expressed mainly by granting the people the gift of Torah. By embracing it, Israel reciprocates—expressing love to God.

**Candlelight time: 4:41 P.M. ... Sabbath Ends at 5:33**

*Scriptural readings for tomorrow morning:*

**TOLEDOT: Genesis 25:19-28:9**

**HAFTARAH: Malach: 1:1-2:7**

*THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: The Haftara reading of Shabbat, "mahar hodesh," brings into view the exemplary friendship of David and Joñathan. The rabbis pointed to it as a model of perfect, pure and enduring love (Mishna Avot 5:19). They distinguished between two kinds of love: conditional and absolute. The conditional love, "teluya bedavar," is contingent, incidental and shaky. Once its base fades away, love vanishes. In contrast, absolute love, "not dependent on a cause," is apt to persist and last. The internal fortitude of true love is illustriously celebrated in the Song of Songs: "Raging waters cannot quench love, neither can the flooding rivers deluge it. Should one offer all his wealth in exchange for love, he would utterly be scorned" (8.7). Pure human love withstands hardships and vicissitudes of life and does not succumb to alluring traps. Alegorically, the love between God and Israel is indissoluble and unexchangeable.*

**by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda**

## TOLEDOT

### Thought Four

THE VOICE AND THE HANDS (HAKOL, HAYADAIM; Genesis 27:22): "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." This declaration uttered by Isaac, after encountering Jacob impersonating Esau -- after listening to his unmistakable voice and touching his disguised hands, which were deceptively covered with hairy skin -- expresses ambivalence concerning the true identity of the claimant first-born son, seeking the father's blessings: Is it Jacob or Esau? The voice betrays the former, the hands the latter.

The "voice" and the "hands" may also be understood metaphorically. The "voice" represents the style of communication, the manner of speech. The "hands" the way of action, the manner of performance. Bringing tasty venison was a typical operation for Esau -- his "hands." Not so the style of the invitation to the meal; this was typical for Jacob -- his "voice". Jacob spoke gently and politely (19), "Please get up and take a seat and eat from my game..." Compare it to Esau's phrase (31), "Let my father get up and eat from his son's game..." Jacob uses "please" (na); Esau does not. Jacob asks his father to take a seat (sheva); Esau does not. Jacob is personal and informal, "my game" (mitzedi); Esau is impersonal and formal, "his son's game" (mitzed beno). The meal was the "hands" of Esau; the invitation the "voice" of Jacob.

Midrashically, the phrase yields a symbolic, prophetic meaning. The "voice" refers to spiritual virtue -- the voice of study and prayer; the "hands" to physical force -- the hands of tyranny and violence. The voice -- not the hands -- is the hallmark of Jacob, of Judaism. When the "voice" of Jacob is dominant, the "hands" of Esau, the weapons of the enemy, will not prevail. The secret of Judaism's survival is in the power of its "voice" -- its excellence in spirit.

---

## Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“GO AWAY!”—At first, Isaac’s people were welcomed to the land of the Philistines. Abimelekh their king even offered them royal protection: “Whoever touches them shall be harshly punished!” Later, however, when Isaac became successful and wealthy, the Philistines became jealous. They plugged up all the wells of the Hebrew newcomers and filled them with dirt. Abimelekh begged Isaac to leave (Gen. 26:16): “Go away from us. You have become too strong for us!” Isaac left and settled somewhere else. But these words of rejection, uttered by the previously friendly king, continue to ring ominously throughout the long history of the Jewish people. The phrase “too strong for us” also means, more poignantly, “because of us”—“You have become wealthy and powerful at our expense!” This accusation is typical. Jewish economic success too often is viewed by others grudgingly as exploitation. As long as the Jew remains helpless and needy he may get some sympathy. The moment he emerges victorious and mighty, he hears again the age-old words: “Go away from us!”