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Imrey Noam

Parashat Toldot

Shabbat Shalom!

14 November 2026 | 4 Kislev | 5787

SHABBAT TIMES

City	Candles 13 Nov.	Ends 14 Nov.
New York	4:21	5:22
Los Angeles	4:32	5:29
Chicago	4:13	5:15

Local time in each city · All times PM

The Good Within

On the weekly parashah
Rabbi Reuven Kuklin



The goodness hidden in a soul is not always visible in its deeds.

Commenting on the words, "He smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him," the Sages explain that begadav, "his garments," also alludes to bogedav, the wayward and wicked among the people of Israel (Sanhedrin 37a). Yitzchak sensed the goodness hidden even within the wicked people who would descend from Yaakov.

But why was it specifically a fragrance that moved Yitzchak to give his blessing?

To understand this, consider a distinctive quality of our sense of smell. A person picks up a beautiful, appetizing apple. Its color is pleasing, it is whole, and it looks perfectly fit to eat. Yet as he brings it to his mouth, he notices an unpleasant smell and realizes that it has begun to spoil. Its appearance gave no sign of this, but its smell revealed what was happening inside. Even the position of the nose above the mouth allows a smell to attract our attention before we taste our food.

Our sense of smell can thus reveal what the eye cannot see. This quality can hint at a spiritual ability: discerning a person's inner essence beneath outward appearances. The Talmud says that Mashiach will be able to judge by smell (Sanhedrin 93b). Why is this ability so important? In light of the above, we can understand smell here as expressing the ability to know a person as he truly is, to penetrate the outer shell and recognize his inner essence.

This also helps us understand the fragrance Yitzchak sensed. He perceived the inner goodness of the wicked people who would descend from Yaakov, even though that goodness was not expressed in their deeds.



In this connection, the Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah (65:22), tells the story of Yosef Meshita. At the enemy's bidding, he entered the Temple and carried out a golden menorah, something even the pagans feared to do. At first glance, it is hard to imagine a worse betrayal. But when they demanded that he enter again, he came to his senses and firmly refused. Although the Romans punished him cruelly, he would not repeat his deed.

Here we see the goodness that remained hidden in his soul even when he was far from G-d. His willingness to suffer rather than anger his Creator again shows how deeply that goodness was rooted within him. It was this goodness that Yitzchak sensed in the fragrance.

A THOUGHT TO PONDER

The Duty to Know

The Torah recounts several mistakes made by Avimelech, alongside his claim that he acted without knowing the facts.

This raises a moral question: how far can ignorance serve as an excuse? A person may have no intention of causing harm, yet still be responsible for investigating the circumstances in which he acts.

In matters important to him, a person usually takes care to learn the details. When his money is at stake, he asks questions, seeks explanations, and checks what he has been told.

Yet when it comes to G-d's words, he makes no effort to clarify matters and excuses himself by saying, "I did not know."

Rabbi Chaim of Brisk was once told of a certain Jew who was, at heart, G-d-fearing but "naive."

Rabbi Chaim replied, "True, he is naive, but that shows that Torah is not his business." For when it comes to his own business, he is far from naive; he understands it very well.

Times: Hebcal.com. Candles: 18 minutes before sunset. Shabbat ends: sun 8.5° below the horizon.

A Night in the Desert

A prayer from the depths of the heart, in the heart of the desert.

Rabbi Yaakov Shechter was once invited to speak to the students of a yeshivah. During his talk, he related a story that had taken place in Ofakim, where Rabbi Shimshon David Pincus served as a rabbi.

A Jewish man devoted to Torah study lived in the town. He and his wife had no children. Years passed. They consulted doctors, underwent treatment, and sought help, but their home remained quiet.

One day, Rabbi Pincus called the man over and said, "There is one thing you have not yet tried. I have no time now. Come to my home at midnight."

At the appointed hour, the man knocked on the door. The rabbi greeted him warmly and invited him into his car.



"What is this thing I should try?" the visitor asked. "Wait. You will soon find out."

They left Ofakim, drove toward Be'er Sheva, and then headed in the direction of Yerucham. Desert stretched out all around them.

Suddenly, the rabbi stopped the car. "Get out here." His companion was bewildered. He looked around: no houses, no people. "What am I supposed to do here?"

Rabbi Pincus replied, "You are now alone in the desert. Just you and the Master of the Universe. Tell Him about your pain. Cry, ask, and plead with all your heart. I will return in half an hour."

The car drove away. Left alone, the man began to pray. Everything that had built up over the long years of waiting, everything he had found so difficult to share with others, he now poured out before the Almighty.

Half an hour later, the rabbi returned. He lowered the window, looked closely at the man's face, and said, "No, I meant a different kind of prayer. Ask from the very depths of your heart. Open your whole soul to Him." Then he drove away again.

The man continued praying. When the car reappeared another half hour later, his face was wet with tears.

Rabbi Pincus smiled. "That is what I meant. Now, with G-d's help, you will see deliverance."

According to the account, nine months later the couple had a son.

Rabbi Shechter ended his story there. But after the talk, as he was leaving the yeshivah, one of the students approached him. "Rabbi," the young man said, "I am that son."

At the beginning of Parashat Toldot, we read: "Yitzchak prayed to G-d opposite his wife, for she was barren" (Bereishit 25:21).

Rabbeinu Bachya draws attention to the order of the words: the Torah mentions prayer first, and only then the barrenness that would seem to have prompted it.

He sees a profound meaning in this. We are accustomed to viewing prayer as a means of obtaining what we lack. Yet prayer also has a purpose of its own: to bring a person closer to the Creator and enable him to turn to Him with all his heart.

That night in the desert, the man brought his most deeply held pain before the Almighty. Years later, standing among Rabbi Shechter's listeners was a young man whose life was the continuation of that story.

Based on material from Otzroteinu.

A THOUGHT TO PONDER

The Question Holds the Key

When Yaakov enters his father Yitzchak's presence to receive the blessings, Yitzchak hears his voice and feels his hands. Sensing that something does not fit, he says, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav" (Bereishit 27:22).

The Sages expound: "When the voice of Yaakov is heard in the synagogues, the hands are not the hands of Esav" (Bereishit Rabbah 65:20). The voice of Torah and prayer is Yaakov's strength. When it is heard as it should be, Esav's hands have no power over him.

But how did the Sages derive this from the verse? Yitzchak explicitly says, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Esav." Both seem to be present together. The verse does not say that Yaakov's voice prevents Esav's hands from exerting their power!

I heard an explanation that makes Yitzchak's very astonishment the basis of the teaching. He is not merely describing what he hears and feels. He is wondering at the contradiction: how can the voice be Yaakov's while the hands are Esav's?

From his astonishment, the Sages learned that these two powers cannot prevail together. When Yaakov's voice is heard as it should be in synagogues and houses of study, Esav's hands have no power over him.