רמב"ן · אור החיים

Ramban & Or HaChayim

ראשון FIRST ALIYAH

25:19 *This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac.*

RAMBAN

AND THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ISAAC, ABRAHAM'S SON. Scripture says this of Esau and Jacob, Isaac's sons who are mentioned further on. Scripture further mentions the circumstances of their birth.

ABRAHAM BEGOT ISAAC. Rashi comments: "Since it was written, Isaac, Abraham's son, it became necessary for Scripture to say, Abraham begot Isaac, since the scoffers of the generation were saying, 'It was from Abimelech that Sarah became pregnant.' Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, formed Isaac's facial features similar to those of Abraham so that all should say, Abraham begot Isaac." Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra further says that the meaning of the word holid (begot) is "bring up and raise," as is the expression, 'Yuldu' (were raised) upon Joseph's knees, even as it says, And he sent them away from Isaac his son. In my opinion the correct reason [that Scripture states here, Abraham begot Isaac], is that it now reverts and begins the genealogy with the founding father, in consonance with Scriptural custom, which is to revert to the head of the ancestry when dealing with people of distinction. Similarly, it is written in the book of Chronicles, The sons of Shem: Elam and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram, and Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Meshech. And Arpachshad begot Shelah, and Shelah begot Eber. After Scripture concluded this listing, it began again by saying, Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, until, Abram, the same is Abraham. So also in the genealogy of Benjamin in the book of Chronicles, Scripture reverts to previous generations and begins, And Ner begot Kish, and Kish begot Saul. Here also [the Torah reverts to the founding father and says], Abraham begot Isaac, and Isaac begot Jacob, as Scripture will soon mention. It is necessary that Scripture return to relate this since it said, And these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son. Now, had it only said, And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son, it would appear that Scripture equated Ishmael and Isaac with respect to genealogy and distinction, all the more so since it mentioned the firstborn first. Furthermore it would have been fitting that it begin with Abraham and say, "These are the generations of Abraham." But Scripture did not wish to do this in order to avoid listing Ishmael and the children of Keturah. It is for this reason that Scripture returns and completes the verse by stating, Abraham begot Isaac, as if to say that it is he [Isaac] alone who is Abraham's offspring. It is considered as if he [Abraham] did not beget anyone else, just as it says, For in Isaac shall seed be called to thee. It is for this reason that it also says above, And these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bore unto Abraham: the phrase, whom Hagar, etc., is for the honor of Isaac, as if to say that the genealogy of these generations is not traceable to Abraham, rather they are the children of the handmaid, even as it says, And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation. Scripture does also similarly in the book of Chronicles. At first it states: The sons of Abraham; Isaac and Ishmael. These are their generations: the first born of Ishmael, Nebaioth. Then it mentions, And the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran. Now it would have been logical to follow this by saying, "the sons of Isaac," but instead it reverts and begins: And Abraham begot Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau, and Israel.

OR HACHAIM

And these are the developments, etc. Why did the Torah mention the birth of Isaac instead of the birth of his children at this point? Why did the Torah need to tell us here that Abraham fathered Isaac?

The intent of the Torah may be understood thus. "And these are Isaac's developments," refers to events that are mentioned later on in this פרשה. Seeing the Torah will speak about the sons of Isaac, and Isaac himself was not originally capable of siring children since his own existence had been rooted in the "left" side of the emanations [until the fact that he submitted to the binding on the altar resulted in his "graduating" to the status of someone born under the aegis of the "right" side of the emanations (kabbalistic concept) compare 22,2 Ed.], the reader might have asked how Isaac could sire children at all? The Torah therefore hints in this way that the fact that Abraham had fathered Isaac enabled him to bestow upon Isaac the ability to beget children.

Alternately, the Torah may refer to Yevamot 64, where we learn that when two righteous people offer a prayer simultaneously, if one of them is also the son of a righteous person G'd will listen to his prayer first. This is why the Torah described G'd as listening to Isaac's prayer in 25,22. Accordingly, the words: אברהם הוליד את יצחק means that Abraham's righteousness was a factor in G'd enabling Isaac to have children.

A further meaning may be connected to Bereshit Rabbah 63,2 which explains Isaiah 29,22, where the prophet describes the as yet unborn Jacob as having redeemed Abraham, i.e. saved him from Nimrod's furnace. Had it not been for Jacob's merit Abraham might not have survived that experience. Our verse then would hint that it was only the combined merit of Jacob and Isaac that enabled Abraham to live long enough to beget Isaac.

The wording of our verse contains an additional meaning of the word תולדת, "developments, offspring, generations." The true "offspring" of the righteous are their good deeds. The various trials Isaac underwent during his life are not specifically described as such by the Torah, although it was he who offered his life to G'd on the altar at Moriah. There are even commentators (such as Ibn Ezra 22,4) who claim that Isaac submitted only against his will. In order to prevent us from arriving at such a conclusion the Torah describes Isaac once more as a true offspring of Abraham, someone who was in no way inferior to his

father in his love for and obedience to G'd. This is stressed both by the word בן אברהם and the conjunctive letter ו before the word אלה. Isaac continued to accumulate meritorious deeds just as Abraham had done before him.

The Torah may also simply hint that Isaac had only one son who followed in the footsteps of Abraham, i.e. "and these are the generations of Isaac, the one who was a true son of Abraham."

Still another meaning may be gleaned from the wording "Abraham begat Isaac." Whereas Isaac did indeed match Abraham in good deeds, he could not receive the same credit since he had his father as an example and could model himself accordingly. Abraham was unique. He was "self-made," did not have a father who served as his role model. This was the reason that the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 41,8) quotes G'd as describing Abraham as "the one who loved Him." Abraham had had to initiate this love towards his Creator without the Creator having served as a guiding light for him first.

Another reason that Isaac is described as the son of Abraham here once again is to teach us that a צדיק who is himself the son of a צדיק is in class by himself, not to be compared to a צדיק who is the son of a רשע. Even though Bereshit Rabbah 38,12 states that Abraham's father Terach became a penitent before he died, he had been wicked for most of his life. The activities of a sinful father cast a pall over the spiritual light spread by the son. When looked at from that vantage point Isaac was better prepared for a pious life than his father. All this is included in the wording ואלה תולדת יצחק בך אברהם.

Isaac did not experience all the painful experiences that Abraham endured. The Torah explains the reason why by writing that he was the son of Abraham. He was the first beneficiary of his father Abraham's great and cumulative merit. If Abraham experienced far more turbulence in his life this was because it could not be said of him that a great man fathered him.

25:20 *Isaac was forty years old when he took to wife Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.*

OR HACHAIM

When Isaac was forty years old, etc. The reason the Torah reports the age at which Isaac married, something that we were not told concerning Abraham, is in order to to explain why Isaac married so late. The words בקחתו את רבקה, explain that he had to wait that long in order to marry this particular girl. The words: "לו לאשה" "for him as a wife," spell out that only this woman could have fulfilled the role of becoming Isaac's wife. Prior to Rebeccah's birth no בת זוג, suitable potential wife, had existed for Isaac. We have explained in the last פרשה that Rebeccah was very young, having only been born when Isaac lay bound on the altar (at the age of 37) and thus became capable of fathering issue. Under the circumstances no criticism can be levelled at Isaac for not getting married earlier. Rebeccah was only three years old when Isaac married her.

...אחות לבן, the daughter of Bethuel from Aram,..sister of Laban. The Torah does not repeat this information in order to remind us who Rebeccah was but in order to defend Rebeccah against possible accusations. Inasmuch as the Torah tells us in the next verse that G'd responded to Isaac's prayer (though both of them prayed simultaneously), someone might have concluded that Rebeccah did not merit that her prayer should be answered by G'd; the Torah explains therefore that the only reason G'd did not respond to her prayer at the time was the fact that her father was the wicked Bethuel. Repeating the information that this Bethuel was an ארמי, is an allusion to the other way of spelling these letters, i.e. רמאי, swindler. The Torah deliberately did not mention the town Bethuel lived in in order to have a chance to allude to the fact that the man was a swindler.

The reason that the Torah again mentions that Rebeccah was a sister of Laban, something we already knew from the encounter of Eliezer and Laban at the well, is in order explain why such a fine woman gave birth to the wicked Esau. Having both a father who was a swindler and a brother who was a master swindler in her background, the marvel was Rebeccah's innocence, not the fact that one of her sons might turn out to be wicked. Baba Batra 110 already remarks that most sons turn out to have a character resembling that of their mother's brothers. The Torah attests that Rebeccah herself was an absolutely righteous woman when Isaac her husband is described as praying in the presence of his wife. Should you ask why Isaac did not examine Rebeccah's brother's character before he decided to marry her, we have already answered that she was the only woman who was his בת זוג, divinely appointed to become his wife. Had this not been so Isaac would never have married the sister of a wicked person such as Laban.

The words אחות לבן also allude to the reason that Rebeccah was barren for so many years. According to Bereshit Rabbah 60,13 this was in order that her fertility could not be credited to the blessings bestowed upon her by her brother Laban in 24,60. The Torah therefore alludes to the cause of barrenness before mentioning the fact that she could not conceive. It was because she was Laban's sister that she needed to wait to conceive until her husband's prayer.

25:21 *Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived.*

OR HACHAIM

He responded to his entreaty. The reason that the Torah does not mention the customary "Isaac knew his wife" (as in Genesis 4,1, or Samuel I 1,19) prior to reporting her pregnancy may have been that they prayed within three days of having had marital relations. Their prayer was that the semen should not go to waste (compare Berachot 60 on the subject of semen turning unfit for conception).

25:22 *But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" She went to inquire of the LORD,*

RAMBAN

AND SHE SAID: IF IT BE SO, 'LAMAH ZEH ANOCHI?'"If the pain of pregnancy is so great, lamah zeh anochi (why did I) pray for and aspire to pregnancy?" Thus Rashi. But it is not correct. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra says that she asked the women if they had experienced such pains, and they said, "No," whereupon she said, "If the matter and custom of pregnancy be as they said, lamah zeh anochi, why am I beset with an unusual pregnancy?" Now according to this exposition, the verse is missing and not complete. The correct interpretation in my opinion is that she said, "If it shall be so with me, lamah zeh anochi, [why am I in the world]? Would that I did not exist, that I should die or never have come into existence." This is similar to the verse, I should have been as though I had not been.

AND SHE WENT 'LIDROSH' (TO INQUIRE) OF THE ETERNAL. Rashi comments: "To tell what her outcome will be." Now I have not discovered the word drishah [lidrosh, to inquire] in relation to G-d except in the context of prayer, as in the verses: I sought ('darashti') the Eternal and He answered me; seek ye Me, ('dirshuni') and live; As I live, saith G-d the Eternal, I will not be inquired of ('edareish') by you.

OR HACHAIM

The children were quarrelling inside her, etc. Both the expression ויתרצצו, "they quarrelled" and the words למה זה אנכי, "why am I therefore" need examination. Rashi explains that "if the pain involved in giving birth is so intense, why did I bother to pray to become pregnant?" It is difficult to reconcile our image of the pious and righteous Rebeccah with Rashi's comment, i.e. that she did not think the pain worth her while in order to become a mother. Also, if that had been her real concern, how did G'd's response alleviate her problem? Our rabbis have offered many and various explanations none of which are acceptable as the plain meaning of the verse. The plain meaning of the word ויתרצצו is based on the root רצץ, to crush. Since there were two fetuses in her womb she felt as if her womb was being crushed. She was afraid that she could not complete her pregnancy and would have a miscarriage as a result. Her question then was rhetorical, i.e. "what good was my becoming pregnant if this pregnancy will not be completed successfully?" The words: "she went to ask G'd," mean that she prayed to G'd to let her complete her pregnancy without mishap. She felt that the miracle of her becoming pregnant after all these years surely should not be wasted by her not giving birth to a healthy child.

25:23 *and the* LORD *answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger."*

RAMBAN

TWO NATIONS ARE IN THY WOMB. The intent of this is that He informed her that she should not fear, for the reason that the struggle in her womb is that she is pregnant with twins, this being the customary way among women who are pregnant with twins. It is possible that He is also saying that since they are destined to be two peoples, hating and warring with each other, at the very beginning of their creation they initiated a quarrel, thus intimating at the situation which will ultimately exist between them. But He assured her that now they will rest, and she will find rest and quiet for herself.

OR HACHAIM

G'd said to her, etc. Although this verse has been explained by many there is still no truly satisfactory answer. G'd responded to her fear that she would miscarry by explaining to her that there was nothing medically wrong in her womb but that she was carrying two instead of merely one fetus. Whereas normally, when a mother expects twins, the two fetuses get along inside the womb (compare Song of Songs 7,4), in Rebeccah's case they did not. Hence her feeling of being crushed. She did not merely carry twins but each one was destined to become a nation with very different characteristics from one another. Not only would each one be a king in his own right, but these respective nations would endure for thousands of years. All of this would not have resulted in her having a feeling of being crushed were it not for the fact that these twins did not conform to the usual pattern of twins. When G'd explained that ממעיך יפרדו, "they will be totally separate already while still inside of you," this meant that they would not only be separate inside of Rebeccah but their being separate would continue after they were born. At any rate, G'd reassured Rebeccah that there was nothing wrong with her womb.

and one nation will be stronger than the other, etc. This means that there is an additional factor preventing these two peoples from dwelling together in harmony; each one will derive its strength from the other (the defeat of the other). We find an example of this concept in a statement in Megillah 6 that the city of Tzor attained its true prominence only through the fall of Jerusalem. Seeing that each nation therefore anxiously awaits the downfall of the other, there is no hope that they will live together in brotherly harmony.

and the senior one will serve the younger. None of the many commentaries on this expression seem to do justice to the words. Our approach will solve the problem. Not only will one of these two nations attain its respective grandeur at the expense of the other, but the nation which is defeated will wind up in servitude to the respective victor. The victor will not content himself with having vanquished his antagonist and deprived him of his assets, but he will oppress him to boot. This will further inhibit any chance of reconciliation and will increase the degree of mutual hatred. This is what the Talmud (Ketuvot 72) had in mind when it stated that a human being and a snake cannot live together in cramped quarters. The words do not mean that Esau and Jacob respectively will live in such a dependence on each other; the meaning is that whoever will be the senior one of these two nations during different periods of history will relate to the other as a tyrannical overlord.

25:26 *Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.*

OR HACHAIM

He called his name Jacob. The Torah refers to G'd, not to Isaac. Proof is that had Isaac been the subject in our verse, the Torah would not have continued : "and Isaac was sixty years, etc," but would have written: "and he was sixty years, etc."

25:28 *Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob.*

RAMBAN

BECAUSE THERE WAS VENISON IN HIS MOUTH. The commentators explained it as meaning either that he [Esau] gave venison into Isaac's mouth, or that he brought Isaac venison. The act of giving or bringing is thus missing from the verse. Similarly: The set time which Samuel; But the Lord — presented or made — me as a mighty warrior. It is possible to explain that Isaac loved Esau because there was always venison in the mouth of Isaac. All day he would desire to eat the venison, and it was always in his mouth. He would not eat anything else, and Esau was the one who brought it to him, as Scripture said, A cunning hunter. In my opinion the correct interpretation is that it is a metaphor which tells us that Esau, in the mouth of his father, was a hunter, as a person is surnamed by his constant occupation. Similarly, Thy habitation is in the midst of deceit; likewise, But I am all prayer. And so they said in Bereshith Rabbah, "Good meat for his mouth, good drink for his mouth."

OR HACHAIM

And Isaac loved Esau. According to the Midrash Tanchuma Esau snared the love of his father by misrepresenting his true character such as enquiring about the correct manner of tithing salt. He did not bother to engage in such trickery except when dealing with his father. This was because he was not concerned about the performance of good deeds but only wanted to ensure his father would have no reason to curse him. He also hoped to obtain blessings. His mother could not dispense either, therefore he made no effort to camouflage his true self when in his mother's presence. This is why we find later on (27,41) that Esau waited for the death of his father before killing Jacob, whereas he did not wait for his mother to die before committing murder. The reason Rebeccah did not inform Isaac of Esau's wickedness may have been that Esau was careful never to put on such a charade in her presence so as not to give his mother an excuse to challenge Isaac's love for him. According to Onkelos who renders the words כי ציד בפיו as ארי מצידה הוי אכיל, "that Isaac ate from the game Esau hunted," we must ask why this reason did not also cause Rebeccah to love Esau, for surely they took most of their meals together or at least Esau did not discriminate against her? Perhaps the reason is that in accordance with the commentary of the Maharik on Even Ha-ezer 70,1 Isaac was under an obligation to feed his wife a meat diet. When a wife comes from a family who is used to such a diet the husband must keep her in the style she was accustomed to. Bethuel was a wealthy and influential man in his town, and no doubt Rebeccah had been used to a high standard of living prior to her marriage. She would not therefore be particularly grateful for the venison, considering it merely as her due.

25:29 *Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the open, famished.*

OR HACHAIM

Jacob cooked food. Perhaps the reason Jacob did this was that he had observed how effective Esau's providing his father with delicious meals had been in cementing Isaac's love for him. He therefore tried to emulate his brother.

25:30 *And Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished"—which is why he was named Edom.*

RAMBAN

OF THIS RED, RED POTTAGE. The dish was either reddened by the lentils which were red, or it had been compounded with some red substance, and Esau, not knowing what it was, called it edom (red). Therefore was his name called Edom since they mocked at him for having sold an honorable birthright for a small dish. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty.

OR HACHAIM

this is why he named him Edom (the red one). Esau called the dish "Edom" not because he called something that was already of a reddish colour "red," but inasmuch as his lifestyle flirted with death and this food was bound to give him an additional lease on life, he called it by his own name. Esau was quite well versed in the significance of names as he himself said in 27,36: "has he (Jacob) not rightly been called יעקב, i.e. "crooked?"

25:31 *Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."*

RAMBAN

SELL ME THIS DAY ('KAYOM') THY BIRTHRIGHT. "I.e., as this day. Just as this day is certain, so make me a binding sale." This is Rashi's language. The literal meaning of the word kayom is "at this time," just as: But stand thou still at this time ('kayom'), that I may cause thee to hear the word of G-d; At this time ('kayom') you shall find him; Let the fat be made to smoke at this time ('kayom'); But unto us belongeth confusion of face, as at this day ('kayom'). It would appear from the opinion of Onkelos that because the sale of the birthright was to take effect after the death of his father Isaac, he [Jacob] said, "Sell me the birthright, with the sale to take effect on whatever day [our father's death] may occur." This is a typical usage of lahein in the Aramaic language: "Wherever (lahein) are you going?" This means, "To what place are you going?" This is derived from the expression, "Whatever (hein) you let me know." Similarly in Bereshith Rabbah, Parshath Vayishlach, "Wherever (velahein) are they going?" is derived from the expression, "Whatever (hein) is broken." This is their customary usage of language in many places. And in the book of Daniel this form appears with a patach under the letter lamed, similar in meaning to the word ilahin (which): Which 'lohin' the angels whose dwelling is not with flesh; whatever ('lohin'), O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee. Now Onkelos translated the Hebrew word zulathi as ilahin its meaning being as the two words, ila hin. Now in carefully edited texts of Onkelos I found the reading, kayom dilhei. This conforms with my interpretation, for hei in their language means "which," as it is said in the Talmud: "Which (hei) Rabbi Meir?" "Which (hei) Rabbi Yehudah?" and others. It is possible that Onkelos understood the word kayom (as the day) as if it were bayom (on the day). The verse would then be stating, "Sell the birthright to me on the day it will come into your possession." We find such usage of the letter kaf elsewhere: As ('Ka'asher') they go, I will spread My net upon them, meaning ba'asher (wherever they go) rather than "whenever they go." Similarly, And for the blood ('kidmei') of thy children that thou didst give unto them; For I have spread you abroad as the four ('ke'arba') winds of the heavens. And some scholars say that the price for the birthright was not the pottage at all. Rather, Scripture tells that when Esau, being faint, desired to eat, Jacob said to him, "Sell me your birthright for money and then eat," and Esau, in his haste for food, answered him, "What is this birthright to me? It is sold to you." He then swore to him upon it, and they sat down to eat and drink. Scripture however did not reveal the price. I do not agree with this interpretation.

OR HACHAIM

Jacob said: "Sell as of this day, etc. The word "as of today," needs amplification. There are aspects to the birthright which do not become effective until after the death of the father, and as such they are legally considered as דבר שלא בא לעולם, something the eventual existence of which is still subject to doubt. The claim to such things cannot legally be established on an "if and when" basis. Jacob added the words "as of this day" in order to make the sale legal at this time. This is in accordance with Baba Metzia 16 and Choshen Mishpat 211,2. When someone who is poor and does not have what to eat goes hunting and offers the proceeds of his hunt for sale adding that such sale be effective "today," the sale is valid. The reason for this is that the poor man desperately needs the proceeds from such a sale. The Geon-

im write that the word "today" is not critical to the effectiveness of such a sale. Even if the sale was to be effective the day after it would still be valid. The decisive criterion is the critical need for the proceeds of the sale. The only reason the Talmud mentions the word "today" is to exclude dates such as "after thirty days or longer." As long as the time stipulated for the sale to take effect is within one day so that the seller can assure his survival during this space of time he has met the important criterion. When Jacob said "כיום," he did not mean "today" but "in accordance with the rule applying to sales that take effect within a day. He saw Esau was very tired and weak and providing this food for him at that time was a matter of survival. Had Esau not been in a temporarily desperate situation the sale would not have been legal.

25:33 *But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.*

RAMBAN

SWEAR TO ME THIS DAY. When Esau said, "What is this birthright to me? I do not desire it," Jacob said to him, "Swear to me that you will not desire it, nor will you inherit it forever." Thereupon he swore to him, and following that he sold it to him, and Jacob gave him the purchase price or the pottage he desired. It is possible that Esau said, "What is this birthright to me? It is sold to you," and Jacob said, "Swear to me that you will never complain about the sale." And when Scripture says that first he swore to him and then he sold it to him, its intent is as if it said that he sold it to him first and then swore to him.

OR HACHAIM

He said: "swear it to me on an oath. The reason that Jacob requested an oath from Esau was because the whole institution of the birthright contains many intangibles, such as the honour and dignity conferred on the firstborn. Jacob was particularly interested in the privilege of performing duties in the Temple, something which was the duty of the firstborn at that time. We are conversant with the rule that a person cannot transfer the right to intangibles either by sale or by gift (Maimonides Hilchot Mechirah chapter 22). This is why Jacob insisted on making such acquisition by means of an oath. Yoreh Deah 239 rules that both tangibles and intangibles may be acquired by means of an oath.

Jacob used the words "swear it to me." Actually the oath is not sufficient to acquire an intangible which does not even exist yet such as becoming heir to one's father if the latter dies before the heir. The reason is that the purchaser cannot truly have convinced himself that he will ever obtain what he has purchased (Baba Metzia 16). If, however, the purchaser was absolutely certain in his mind, the object has indeed been acquired and the oath is quite irrelevant. This is why Jacob had to add the words כיום, as I have explained already. In the meantime I have found a book of the Rivash in which he writes as follows in the course of item number 328. "You have written that you have seen that the son of the Rosh wrote in the name of his father that if someone tried to acquire a "future" by means of an oath such an acquisition is legally valid. He proves the thesis from the sale of the birthright from Esau to Jacob and the fact that the latter insisted on an oath. Since we have neither the signature of the Rosh or his son Rabbi Yaakov to confirm such a theory, it is not admissible to place such theories in the mouths of great men [in order to lend them weight Ed.] seeing that the theory has absolutely no merit. The "so-called" proof from our story is no proof at all seeing that all this occurred before the Torah was given to the Jewish people. It is quite possible that in those days people did not distinguish between selling "futures" and selling "actuals." The oath then would merely have served to reinforce the sale, to protect oneself against the seller changing his mind at a later date. Esau was, after all, a man of violence." Thus far the Rivash. This is exactly in agreement with what we have written, the only difference being that the Rivash did not see fit to provide a reason why Jacob insisted on an oath.

The reason Jacob said: "swear an oath on it to me," instead of merely "swear an oath on it," is so that it would be understood that the sale was for the benefit of Jacob (not for someone else). The oath had to be acceptable to Jacob else Esau could have annulled it in his heart. The essential element of an oath is the heart, i.e. what a person has in mind at the time of the oath (compare Rabbi Akiva in Torat Kohanim 12). Rabbi Akiva insists that at the time an oath is sworn the person undertaking it must have no reservations about the declaration he makes on oath. When Jacob said "swear it to me," he meant: "make your oath correspond to my will."

Another reason Jacob was careful to add the word לי "to me," was that only he was able to acquire the birthright. Inasmuch as the benefits of the birthright include such intangibles as the duty to perform sacrificial service in the sanctuary, this was something that devolved from Isaac to his son. This privilege could not be sold to anyone who was not a son of Isaac. The dignity of the office of the priesthood (in those days equivalent to the birthright) could also not be transferred to an outsider.

He sold his birthright, etc. The Torah here had to state the validity of the sale a) because of the reasons we have explained, b) because Esau acted under some kind of duress, c) that Esau sold something for a mere fraction of its real worth. In his commentary on Choshen Mishpat item 227, the Maharik writes as follows: "if someone sold something due to pressing need even at a price significantly below its accepted market value, he cannot retract because he was aware of what he was doing and forgave the difference in value to the purchaser." In view of this ruling the fact that Esau sold the valuable birthright for a single swallow of Jacob's potage did not invalidate the sale. Esau had described his state of exhaustion as: "here I am about to die;" there is no greater emergency than a person selling something in order to save his life. We know from Job 2,4 that a person will give up all that he has for his life. Had Esau not been in such a state, Jacob could not have acquired the birthright from him. When Solomon said in Proverbs 5,22 that the wicked will be entrapped by their iniquities, he had Esau in mind. According to Bereshit Rabbah 63,14 Esau had committed a number of sins on that fateful day and this was the reason that he forfeited the birthright which was transferred to someone more deserving than he.

25:34 *Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.*

RAMBAN

SO ESAU DESPISED HIS BIRTHRIGHT. Who so despiseth the word shall suffer thereby. But, indeed, Scripture has already explained the reason that Esau consented to the sale. This was because he was in mortal danger from his hunting animals, and it was likely that he would die while his father was alive, and the birthright carried with it no distinction except after the passing

of the father. So of what benefit was the birthright to him? This then is what Scripture says: And he did eat and drink, and he rose and went, and he despised, for, after having eaten and drunk, he returned to his hunt in the field which was the cause of the despising of the birthright. For there is no desire in fools except to eat and drink and to fulfill their momentary desire, not giving a care for tomorrow. Now Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra has erred here exceedingly by saying that Esau despised the birthright because he saw his father destitute of wealth. Now, [continues Ibn Ezra,] many wonder about Isaac's poverty since Abraham left him with great wealth. But have they never seen a person who was wealthy in his younger years and became poor in his old age? An indication that Isaac was indeed poor is the fact that Isaac loved Esau because of his venison. Furthermore, had there been abundant food in his father's house and he [Esau] "the honorable one in his sight," he would not have sold his birthright for pottage. Also, if his father ate savory meat every day, what reason was there for him to say to Esau, "Bring me some venison?" Why did Jacob not have costly garments as Esau had? Why did his mother not give Jacob some silver and gold for his journey when he fled to Haran so that he had to say, And He will give me bread to eat, and a garment to put on? Why did she not send him some money — since she loved him — so that he was required to tend Laban's flock? The verse which states, Thus the man grew [in wealth], must refer to the period before he became old. Now ignorant people think that wealth is a great distinction for the righteous. Let Elijah prove the contrary. These ignorant people further ask, "Why did G-d cause Isaac to lack wealth?" Perhaps they could also inform us why He caused Isaac's vision to be diminished? And let them not dismiss me with a reply based upon a d'rash for there is indeed a secret in the matter, and we must not probe since the thoughts of G-d are deep and no man has the power to understand them. All these are Abraham ibn Ezra's words. Now I wonder who has blinded Abraham ibn Ezra's reasoning in this matter, causing him to say that Abraham left Isaac great wealth, and he lost it just prior to this event, [that is, the sale of the birthright], and for this reason, Esau despised the birthright, for this matter of the sale of the birthright took place when Jacob and Esau were still young, before Esau married, as Scripture tells, and after the sale of the birthright, Isaac again became wealthy in the land of the Philistines until he became very great... and the Philistines were jealous of him. Following that, [according to Ibn Ezra, we must say that Isaac] again became poor, and he desired the venison of his son Esau and the savory meats. All this is laughable. Furthermore, the verse says, And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that G-d blessed his son Isaac. Now the blessing refers to increase of wealth, possessions and honor, but where was His blessing if he lost the wealth of his father and became impoverished? Afterwards it says, And I will be with Thee, and I will bless thee, [but according to Ibn Ezra you will have to say that Isaac] became rich and then poor! And if it be true that in matters of wealth, There are righteous men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked, this does not apply to those righteous men who have been expressly blessed by the Holy One, blessed be He, since the blessing of the Eternal maketh rich, and no sorrow is added thereto. Rather, the patriarchs all were as kings before whom kings of the nations came and with whom they made covenants. Now it is written concerning Isaac and Abimelech, And they swore one to another. But if Isaac had suffered bad fortune and lost his father's wealth, how did [Abimelech, King of the Philistines, and Phichol, the head of his army], say, we saw plainly that the Eternal was with thee, when he was already in financial difficulty? Rather, Esau's disdain of the birthright was due to his brutal nature. It is possible that the law of double portion to which the firstborn is entitled according to the statutes of the Torah was not in effect in ancient times. [At that time the birthright] was only a matter of inheriting the pre-eminence of the father and his authority so that he [the firstborn] would receive honor and distinction in relation to his younger brother. It is for this reason that Esau said to Isaac, I am thy son, thy firstborn, meaning to say that he is the firstborn who deserves to be blessed. Similarly, [Joseph said to his father, Jacob], For this is the firstborn; put thy hand upon his head, thereby meaning that Jacob should give him precedence in the blessing. Perhaps the firstborn also took slightly more of the inheritance since the law of double portion is an innovation of the statutes of the Torah. And as for the venison in his mouth which Isaac desired so strongly, this is in keeping with the custom of princes and kings. They prefer venison above all food, and out of fear, all nations bring them gifts of venison. Esau flattered his father by bringing him all the venison so that he may always eat of it to his heart's content, and the love of a father for his firstborn is easily understood. As for Isaac's saying that he would bless Esau after he had prepared the savory meats for him, that was not a reward or a recompense for the food. Instead, he wanted to derive some benefit from him so that his very soul would be bound up in his at the time that he brought him the food so that he would then bless him with a complete desire and a perfect will. Perhaps Isaac discerned in himself that following the meal his soul would be delighted and joyous, and then the Ruach Hakodesh would come upon him, [as was the case with Elisha the prophet, who said], 'But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Eternal came upon him. And as for not giving wealth to Jacob, that was [not due to Isaac's poverty but rather] because Jacob was fleeing for his life. He left the country alone without his brother's knowledge, and had he been given along wealth, servants and camels, they would have increased his enemies' jealousy and resulted in their ambushing him and killing him. Our Rabbis do indeed say that Jacob was robbed [at the outset of his journey of whatever possessions he had]. And who has told Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra that Jacob had no costly garments, fine linen and silk and embroidered robes? Rather, Scripture states that when going to the field to hunt, Esau would change his garments for his hunting clothes, and due to the fact that [because of his dim eyesight], Isaac always touched his son and his clothes with his hands, Rebekah clothed Jacob with them lest he recognize him by his clothes. You see that this is precisely what Isaac did: And he smelled the odor of his garments because he had put them among calamus and cinnamon, even as it is written, Myrrh and aloes, and cassia are all thy garments. The spices grew in the Land of Israel, and it is for this reason that Isaac said, The odor of my son is as the odor of a field. Because he was a man of the field his garments had the odor of the field or that of the blossoms of the trees, just as our Rabbis explained it: As the odor of a field of apples. And as for the question raised above concerning the quality of Isaac's lack of vision, it is a question raised by the ignorant, for if it was brought about especially by G-d, it was in order that Isaac bless Jacob, this being the purport of the verse, And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, he called Esau. And in line with the natural meaning of Scripture, this was but a manifestation of old age, the explan-

ation of the verse being as follows: And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim in his old age, he called Esau. Now of Jacob himself it is said later on, Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. Of Achiyah the Shilonite it is also written, Now Achiyah could not see; for his eyes were set by reason of his age, and concerning Moses our teacher it is related with wonder that his eye was not dim.

OR HACHAIM

Esau arose, went on his way and despised the birthright. The Torah stresses that Esau's despising the birthright was a conscious act. Had the Torah written: "He arose, he went and he despised the birthright," we could have thought that he merely did so unconsciously. The Torah added the word "Esau" here once more to tell us that Esau deliberately showed disdain for the birthright. Even if Esau had not desperately needed to trade something to obtain some of Jacob's potage he would have sold the birthright cheaply at any time if Jacob had asked him to.

26:1 *There was a famine in the land—aside from the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham—and Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, in Gerar.*

RAMBAN

BESIDE THE FIRST FAMINE THAT WAS IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM. Perhaps there was no famine in the world until the days of Abraham. This is why Scripture counts from it, for otherwise, what need is there to mention it? In my opinion the correct reason why Scripture mentions it is to tell us that people remembered the first famine, mentioning that on account of it Abraham went down to Egypt and there G-d did him great honor. It was for this reason that Isaac wanted to go in his father's footsteps by descending into Egypt until it was said to him, Go not down into Egypt. The reason for the prohibition has been stated by our Rabbis: "You [Isaac] are a perfect burnt-offering and residence outside of the Land of Israel does not befit you." In my opinion, there is also included in this subject a reference to the future. Abraham's exile into Egypt on account of the famine is an allusion to the exile of his children there. His going to Abimelech however was not an exile for he resided there of his own volition. But Isaac's going [to the land of Abimelech, as recorded here in this verse, And Isaac went unto Abimelech] on account of the famine, does allude to an exile since he left his place against his will and went to another land. Now Isaac's exile was from his own place to the land of the Philistines, which was the land in which his father had resided. This alludes to the Babylonian Exile, which took place in the land in which their ancestors had resided, namely, Ur of the Chaldees. Know further that this Babylonian Exile mentioned is mirrored in the events which befell Isaac in that they did not take his wife in the land of the Philistines. Rather, his lot there was only exile and fear. At the beginning Abimelech said, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death. Later he regretted it and said, Go from us. Afterwards, he returned and made a covenant with Isaac Similarly, in the Babylonian Exile, they were exiled there because of the burning heat of famine, and while there, they were neither subjugated, nor were they treated harshly. On the contrary, their leaders were princes in the government. Later on, they said, Whosoever there is among you of all His people — his G-d be with him — let him go up, even alerting the princes and governors beyond the River to help them. Later on, they ceased work [on the House of G-d in Jerusalem] , and it ceased "for a season and a time." Later, they again changed their policy and gave permission for the construction of the House of G-d, saying, That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savor unto the G-d of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his sons.

TO ABIMELECH, KING OF THE PHILISTINES. It is not known whether this is the same Abimelech who lived in the days of Abraham or whether every Philistine king was so called, for in the time of David he was also called Abimelech. Onkelos, however, is of the opinion that the Abimelech with whom Isaac dealt was a son [of the one mentioned in the account of Abraham]. The reason that Isaac went to Abimelech was that he intended to go down to Egypt, so he went to Abimelech, his father's confederate, in the hope that perhaps he would deal kindly with him in the days of the famine, thus making it unnecessary for him to go down to Egypt. Now Abimelech, on account of his covenant with Abraham, did not harm him or his family at all. However, the men of the place asked Isaac, in mere quest, concerning his wife, and he said, She is my sister. Even so, neither the king nor any of his men touched her for they remembered the affair of Abraham. Hence Abimelech said, One of the people might lightly have lain, meaning to say, "I Abimelech did not touch her, and I was careful concerning her, but one of the men of the land might easily have stumbled, and then you would have made us incur guilt, as we sinned in the matter of your father."

26:2 *The LORD had appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you.*

RAMBAN

DWELL IN THE LAND WHICH I SHALL TELL THEE OF. It is incomprehensible that G-d should tell Isaac at one time, Dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of, [and in the following verse continue], Sojourn in this land, [and in both cases be referring to the same land]. Instead, its explanation is as follows: "Go not down into Egypt, and dwell all your days in the land which I shall tell you from time to time. At the bidding of G-d you should move, and at the bidding of G-d you should encamp, and right now, sojourn in this land, the land of the Philistines, for unto thee and unto thy seed I will give it, even as it is written, Counted to the Canaanites are the five lords of the Philistines." It is possible that [the event referred to in the beginning of the verse], And the Lord appeared unto him, and said ... dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of, happened earlier so that before Isaac left his place it was said to him, "Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of when you will be there. Now dwell in this land, the land of Canaan, which will comprise many peoples and many lands, for I now command that you should not leave it forever for all these lands will I give to thy seed." Following this command, Isaac journeyed from his place because of the famine to go into all the lands of Canaan, to dwell in the land which He would tell him. And when he came to Gerar, He said to him, "Dwell here." It was not necessary however for Scripture to detail this for it is known that Isaac would not transgress the command of G-d. A similar case of interpretation appears in the verse, Upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of, as I mentioned there.

OR HACHAIM

Dwell in the land I shall tell you to. This was a general directive to accept G'd's instructions where he was to take up residence even if it conflicted with his own wishes. G'd told him this in order to be able to reward him for obeying. G'd had done

something similar when He told Abraham in 12,1 that he was to go to a place G'd would designate (in the future). Five verses later on G'd specified the land, i.e. "the land of Canaan," something He could have done immediately were it not for the fact that He wanted Abraham to accumulate merit for obeying His directive.

26:3 *Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.*

RAMBAN

AND I WILL FULFILL THE OATH WHICH I SWORE UNTO ABRAHAM THY FATHER. There is no need for the Holy One, blessed be He, to assure Isaac that He will not violate the oath which He swore to his father, for He is not a man, that He should repent. Abraham had no other seed upon whom a covenant had been established with G-d except Isaac. The oath, moreover, was not given on condition. In the case of Jacob, it was necessary that he be given such assurance on account of his brother Esau. He was thus saying that in him [Jacob] and his seed will the covenant be fulfilled, not in Esau. [But in the case of Isaac, why was it necessary that he be given such a promise?] It would appear then that this expression, Vehakimothi eth hashevuah, is itself an oath. It is for this reason that the Torah always says, The land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Thy servants, to whom Thou didst swear by Thine own self. For we find no source for an oath having been given to Isaac except this verse. Now it was the desire of the Holy One, blessed be He, to swear to each one of the patriarchs to let it be known that each one was worthy of the covenant being made with him alone, and that the merit of each one stands before Him together with their seed. Even though the previous one suffices, it is an additional merit and honor to them. It is for this reason He said, Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land, since all of them had the distinction of G-d having made a covenant with them. It is possible that He promised something additional to Isaac through this oath, namely, that He will fulfill in him himself, the oath He had sworn to Abraham his father, i.e., that he [Isaac] will be a blessing among the nations, even as He said to Abraham his father, And all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves with thy seed. The explanation of the verse before us will thus be: "And I will fulfill in thee the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father since you will be a blessing among the nations." Similarly, He also says in the case of Jacob, And in thee and in thy seed shall all of the families of the earth be blessed.

OR HACHAIM

for I shall give to you and to your descendants, etc. The land of the Philistines was included in the this gift of the land. Nachmanides also understands our verse in that sense. He writes that the reason G'd said "to you" i.e. not only to Isaac's descendants, may have accounted for the phenomenal success Isaac experienced when he planted in the land of the Philistines (26,12). G'd also intended to tell Isaac that he would be farming successfully there. [after all, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were shepherds not tillers of the soil. Ed.] Perhaps it was because Abraham at the time had failed to establish himself on the soil of the land of the Philistines that G'd told Isaac that he would stake a better claim to that land by ploughing and sowing it. This is why G'd was specific in speaking about כל הארצות האל, "all of these lands."

G'd also wanted to assure Isaac that Ishmael would not share in any of the promises made by Him to Abraham. This is why G'd stressed the word לך, "to you." G'd added the word ולזרעך, "and to your seed," to exclude children of Isaac who would not qualify as his seed in the spiritual sense of the word. This is similar to G'd having told Abraham (21,12) "through Isaac will your seed be known." Nedarim 31 derives from that wording that not all of Isaac's seed would be worthy.

26:5 *inasmuch as Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings."*

RAMBAN

AND HE KEPT MY CHARGE. Rashi comments: "As a reward that Abraham hearkened to My voice when I tested him. And he kept My charge — these are the precautionary decrees instituted by the Sages, which are intended to make us avoid the violation of Biblical laws, such as Second Degrees of forbidden marriages and certain prohibited acts on the Sabbath. My commandments — these are precepts which, had they not been written in the Torah, were requisite to have been written, such as robbery and murder. My statutes — these are matters against which the evil inclination and the heathen nations argue, such as the prohibitions against eating the swine and the wearing of garments woven of wool and linen, there being no apparent rationale for them except that they are decrees of the King imposed on His subjects. And My laws — the plural is intended to include, [besides the Written Law], the Oral Law as well as those rules given to Moses from Sinai." [Thus far the words of Rashi.] Now if so, all this interpretation is posited on the opinion that Abraham fulfilled and observed the Torah before it was given on Sinai. This is indeed what the Sages of the Midrash said in connection with the verse, And Joseph gave them 'agaloth' (wagons), thereby indicating to his father that when he left him they were studying the section dealing with Eglah Arufah. Thus Joseph occupied himself with Torah just as his fathers did. Though the Torah had not yet been given, it is still written of Abraham, And he kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. There the Sages also said that Abraham observed the details of the Torah, which he taught to his children, etc. The question presents itself: If it be the case [that the laws of the Torah were observed by our ancestors before the Torah was given on Sinai], how did Jacob erect a pillar and marry two sisters in their lifetime, and, in the opinion of our Rabbis, four sisters. Also, Amram [Moses' father] married his aunt, and Moses our teacher erected twelve pillars. How then was it possible that they should be permissive in matters of Torah which Abraham their ancestor had prohibited on himself, and for which G-d appointed him reward, when he [Abraham] was wont to command his children and his household after him to walk in His ways? In the case of Jacob the Sages taught that he observed the Sabbath and established borders for Sabbath distances. In this matter of the Sabbath it is possible though that Jacob observed it because it is equal in importance to the entire Torah since it testifies to the act of Creation. Perhaps then we should say that My charge refers to the Second Degree of marriages which were forbidden to the Sons of Noah; My commandments applies to robbery and murder; My statutes refers to the laws against eating a limb torn off from a live animal, as well as breeding mixed

kinds of cattle or grafting together different species of trees; and My laws refer to civil statutes and the prohibitions against idol worship. The Sons of Noah were commanded concerning all of these matters, and Abraham observed and fulfilled the Will of his Creator, observing even the details and the strictures of their commandments, even as the Sages mentioned: "The tractate of idolatry of our father Abraham contained four hundred chapters." They further expounded [on the verse referring to Isaac, which says], And he found in that year a hundredfold, that he measured the produce for the purpose of tithing, since the patriarchs were the generous ones of the peoples, giving tithes to the poor or the priests of G-d, such as Shem and Eber and their disciples, just as it is said, And he was a priest of the most high G-d. Now it appears to me from a study of the opinions of our Rabbis that Abraham our father learned the entire Torah by Ruach Hakodesh and occupied himself with its study and the reason for its commandments and its secrets, and he observed it in its entirety as "one who is not commanded but nevertheless observes it." Furthermore, his observance of the Torah applied only in the Land of Israel, whereas Jacob married two sisters only when outside the Land, and similarly with Amram who married his aunt. For the Commandments are the ordinance of the G-d of the land, even though we have been charged with personal duties in all places. Our Rabbis have already alluded to this secret, and I will yet call your attention to it with the help of G-d. And the matter of the erection of the pillar [by Jacob and Moses referred to above] was a commandment that was innovated at a certain time, as the Sages expounded from the verse, "Neither shalt thou set up a pillar which the Eternal thy G-d hateth, He hated it although it was pleasing to Him in the days of the ancestors." And with respect to Joseph concerning whom the Sages expounded that he observed the Sabbath even in Egypt, it was because it is equal in importance to all the commandments, constituting, as it does, a testimony to Creatio ex nihilo. Therefore Joseph would do so in order to teach his children faith in the Creation of the world, to remove from their hearts the false doctrine of idolatry and the opinion of the Egyptians. This then is the intent [of the Sages when speaking of the patriarchs and their children observing the Torah]. In accordance with the literal meaning of Scripture, you may say that My charge means faith in the Deity, implying that Abraham believed in the unique Divine Name and kept vigilant guard over it in his heart, differing thereby with the worshippers of idols, and calling by the name of the Eternal to bring many to His worship. My commandments refers to all that G-d commanded Abraham: Go out of thy land, the bringing of his son as a burnt-offering, and the expulsion of the maidservant and her son. My statutes refers to walking in the paths of G-d by being gracious and merciful, doing righteousness and judgment, and commanding his children and his household concerning them. And My Laws refers to the circumcision of Abraham himself and his sons and his servants, as well as all Commandments of the Sons of Noah which constitute their Law.

OR HACHAIM

Abraham hearkened to My voice. He successfully passed all the tests I subjected him to; וישמור משמרתי, he was careful not to transgress anything I had commanded him even unintentionally, through momentary carelessness. וחוקותי, these are the commandments that appear to be without logical foundations. תורתי, "he studied My commandments in order not to forget them," just as Moses commanded Israel in Deut. 4,9.

שני SECOND ALIYAH

26:6 *So Isaac stayed in Gerar.*

OR HACHAIM

Isaac settled in Gerar. He observed G'd's directive and cancelled his previous plans.

26:7 *When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he was afraid to say "my wife," thinking, "The men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful."*

RAMBAN

AND HE SAID: SHE IS MY SISTER. They did not ask concerning the children for he would say, "They are my children from another woman."

26:8 *When some time had passed, Abimelech king of the Philistines, looking out of the window, saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah.*

OR HACHAIM

making sport with his wife Rebeccah. He indulged in the kind of affectionate behaviour customary between man and his wife. If we are to accept the interpretation of Bereshit Rabbah 64,5 that Avimelech observed Isaac making love to his wife, we must assume that this took place under circumstances when marital intercourse is permitted even during the day, such as for therapeutic purposes (compare Maimonides Hilchot Deyot 40, or the example quoted in Ketuvot 65 about the widow of Abbaye who inadvertently caused Rava to become aroused so that he had to go home in the middle of the day in order to have marital relations with his wife). The righteous endeavour not even to commit the semblance of an unbecoming act.

26:11 *Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death."*

OR HACHAIM

will be executed. The repetition of the word מות refers to death by human tribunal as well as by heavenly forces. The reason Avimelech used the word "whoever touches," was to warn his subjects that even conduct for which Gentiles normally are not punishable by death would become capital offences in this instance (compare what we have written on Genesis 20,4).

26:12 *Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold the same year. The LORD blessed him,*

OR HACHAIM

one hundred fold; G'd blessed him. Since we have a general rule that anything that is measured does not qualify for a blessing, the Torah here informs us that G'd blessed Isaac's harvest even though the amount of his harvest had been measured. The Torah also wanted to tell us that despite the phenomenal success of Isaac as a farmer during a famine he did not suffer the effects of an evil eye of anyone who was jealous of his success.

שלישי THIRD ALIYAH

26:14 *he acquired flocks and herds, and a large household, so that the Philistines envied him.*

RAMBAN

AND HE HAD POSSESSIONS OF FLOCKS, AND POSSESSIONS OF HERDS, AND A GREAT HOUSEHOLD, meaning she-asses and camels, he-asses, and men-servants and handmaids. Now Scripture mentions these but not silver and gold, as it says concerning Abraham, because the wealth which he amassed in the land of the Philistines consisted of flocks and a great household. And the Philistines were jealous of him in this matter. This is the meaning of that which Abimelech says to Isaac, For thou art become much mightier than we. The king said to him, "I, too, who am the king do not have in my home such flocks and domestics as you, and it is a disgrace to us that your household is greater than that of the king."

26:15 *And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth.*

OR HACHAIM

and all the wells, etc. The reason we are told this in connection with Isaac's outstanding success is to remind us that the wicked cannot stand to see the righteous successful. They are jealous. The Torah adds that the first Jew Abraham already had the same experience during his lifetime. The Torah therefore makes a point of saying: סתמום וימלאום עפר, they sealed them and covered them with dust, instead of merely reporting that they filled the wells with earth. Apparently after Abraham's death the Philistines placed rocks on the sites where Abraham had found water. This was why Isaac even had to dig up these wells anew.

26:16 *And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you have become far too big for us."*

OR HACHAIM

for you have become more powerful than we. Even the wealth and authority of the king paled into insignificance compared to the reputation of Isaac. There is no greater humiliation for a king than to be ranked lower than some other resident in his domain.

26:17 *So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the wadi of Gerar, where he settled.*

RAMBAN

IN THE VALLEY OF GERAR, far away from the city. And [Isaac] digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father, and which the Philistines had stopped up before Isaac left Gerar, he once again dug. Thus the words of Rashi. It would appear from Rashi's words, then, that the wells mentioned here [in Verse 18] are the same as those mentioned [above in Verse 15]: For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. But this is not so, for how would the Philistines give him permission when they had said, "These wells are a source of danger to us because of invaders." Rather, the wells [mentioned in Verse 18] are different ones in another location since the valley of Gerar is the name of a place, or perhaps the valley extended from Gerar to another land, and when the Philistines, namely, the lords of Gerar — the principality of the king — became jealous of Isaac, they stopped the wells which were his by inheritance from his father in the boundary of the city of Gerar. The king then sent him away from his throne-city, and he went to another city. Possibly, this new place was not part of his kingdom even though it was in the land of the Philistines. There were other wells there which Abraham had dug when he lived there for many days but which the Philistines stopped upon his death since Isaac did not dwell there. They did not do this out of hatred. But in the days of Abraham, [even after he had moved from there], they did not want to stop them out of respect to him, saying, "Perhaps he will return to dwell there." This was why Isaac returned and dug them in the valley. But the herdsmen of the valley quarrelled with him saying, The water is ours, meaning, "The well is in the valley, and the waters ooze forth from that valley while those in the valley are diminished. Hence they are ours." It is for this reason that Scripture mentions, And they found there a well of living water, stating that it was a source gushing forth living water which did not come from the valley as those who quarrelled with Isaac had previously claimed.

OR HACHAIM

He camped in the valley of Gerar and dwelled there. Isaac did not want to abandon living in the land of the Philistines since G'd had specifically instructed him to make his residence there (verse 3). Even though the wadi that Isaac now moved to may not have been exactly part of G'd's original commandment to "sojourn in this country etc.," he was, after all, forced by circumstances to leave the capital of Avimelech's country. Perhaps the whole episode may be considered as a test of Isaac's faith in G'd, who, though telling him: "I shall give the land to you and to your descendants," did not allow him to remain for long in that part of the land even as a private citizen. G'd wanted to see if Isaac would question His ways just as He had tested Abraham in a similar fashion.

26:20 *the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." He named that well Esek, because they contended with him.*

RAMBAN

AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THE WELL ESEK. Scripture gives a lengthy account of the matter of the wells when in the literal interpretation of the story there would seem to be no benefit nor any great honor to Isaac in that he and his father did the identical thing. However, there is a hidden matter involved here since Scripture's purpose is to make known a future matter. A well of living water alludes to the House of G-d which the children of Isaac will build. This is why Scripture mentions a well of living waters, even as it says, A fountain of living waters, the Eternal. He called the first well Esek (Contention), which is an allusion to the First House, concerning which the nations contended with us and instigated quarrels and wars with us until they destroyed it. The second well he called Sitnah (Enmity), a name harsher than the first. This alludes to the Second House, which has indeed been referred to by this very name, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote 'sitnah' against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. And during its entire existence they

were a source of enmity unto us until they destroyed it and drove us from it into bitter exile. The third well he called Rechovoth (Spacious). This is a reference to the Future House, which will be speedily built in our days, and it will be done without quarrel and feud, and G-d will enlarge our borders, even as it says, And if the Eternal thy G-d enlarge thy border, as He hath sworn, etc., which refers to the future. And concerning the Third House of the future it is written, Broader and winding about higher and higher. [The concluding statement in the present narrative, concerning the naming of the third well], And we shall be fruitful in the land, signifies that all peoples will come to worship G-d with one consent.

רביעי FOURTH ALIYAH

26:24 *That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Fear not, for I am with you, and I will bless you and increase your offspring for the sake of My servant Abraham."*

RAMBAN

FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH THEE. Since Abimelech drove him away because of the Philistines' jealousy of him, and since the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with him, Isaac feared lest they gather against him and smite him and his family. Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, assured him that he should not fear them, and He blessed him. Then He prompted them so that the king went to Isaac with greater honor than that which he did to his father since he came with Phichol, the chief of his host, and also brought with him many of his friends.

OR HACHAIM

do not be afraid for I am with you, etc. Seeing that Isaac had experienced the humiliation of expulsion at the hands of Avimelech and did not know where to turn next, he might have felt abandoned by G'd. This is why G'd reassured him, telling him not to be afraid.

26:26 *And Abimelech came to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his councilor and Phicol chief of his troops.*

OR HACHAIM

[Dear reader, you will note that the author distances himself from the commentary of the Bereshit Rabbah on the following verse, calling it merely homiletical, and proceeds to substitute his own. I leave it to you to decide which approach seems more far-fetched. I have followed my practice of printing this commentary in smaller print than usual in such cases Ed.] ואבימלך הלך אליו מגרר, and Avimelech went to him from Gerar, etc. Why did the Torah have to tell us where Avimelech came from? We know he lived in Gerar! Aware of this difficulty, Bereshit Rabbah 64,9 mentions that the word מגרר is to be understood here as מגורר, that the king experienced strange growths on his body which he attributed to his treatment of Isaac. Of course, this is an homiletical explanation only.. Besides, why did he have to take his general Phichol and Achuza along? If these people were merely part of the Royal entourage, the Torah did not have to bother mentioning it.

The intent of the Torah is to explain why Avimelech suddenly needed Isaac as an ally and flattered him though he should have been secure in the knowledge of the covenant Abraham had made with him (21,23). The validity of that covenant extended for three generations into the future. Nachmanides attempts to answer this problem claiming that Avimelech was simply afraid that Isaac would not honour a covenant made by his father seeing that Avimelech on his part had violated the agreement by expelling Isaac. I have not seen anywhere that part of the agreement between Abraham and Avimelech included the right of Abraham or his descendants to reside in the land of the Philistines. There was therefore no breach of the agreement when Avimelech asked Isaac to leave Gerar, and the problem we have raised remains unanswered.

We have learned in Nedarim 65 that if someone has denied himself (by a vow) the benefit of anything owned by a second party such a vow can be annulled only in the presence of the other affected party. The Talmud understood the words of the Torah in which Moses agreed to stay with Yitro as a vow not to return to Pharaoh in Egypt. When G'd told Moses to return to Egypt the Torah says: "G'd said to Moses in Midian 'go return to Egypt" (Exodus 4,19). There too the words "in Midian" appear superfluous at first glance, except for the fact that G'd told Moses that seeing he had made his vow in Midian that was the place he had to annul it. Concerning the rule that the annulment has to take place where the vow was made originally, we find the following glossary in Haga-ot Maimoniyot chapter six of Hilchot Shevuot: Ri states that this ruling applies in that form only as a desirable (לחתחילה) form of annulment. If, however, the vow was revoked by the person who made it in the absence of the person affected by it, such an annulment is valid. Even the rule that it is desirable that the person who was the subject of the vow be present at the annulment applies only when the person who denied himself any benefits of that party had originally been the recipient of a favour by that party, such as Moses to whom Yitro had given his daughter, or King Zedekiah who had been set free by King Nebuchdnezzar. When no such benefit had been received by the person who has made the vow there is no need for the subject of the annulment to be present at all, as we know from Sotah 36. Thus far the quote from Haga-ot Maimoniyot. From the above it is clear that the person who uttered the oath denying himself benefits from a second party can proceed to have this oath annulled without bothering about the presence of the second party involved. The question of whether Abraham had obtained benefits from Avimelech prior to having sworn an oath to him is therefore irrelevant. As a matter of record, Abraham received absolutely no benefit from Avimelech. The gifts that Avimelech gave him were only in expiation for the humiliation he had caused Sarah. The report in the Torah shows clearly that Abraham departed from Gerar immediately after that episode and settled in Beer Sheva. Abraham did not accept Avimelech's gifts in order to remain in Gerar but moved to Beer Sheva where Isaac also lived after his expulsion from Gerar. I have found a statement recorded in Bereshit Rabbah 54,2 on Genesis 21,23 where Avimelech refers to the kindness he showed Abraham and requests a kindness in return. The "kindness" was Avimelech's offer to Abraham to reside in the land of the Philistines, an offer which Abraham declined. The request to conclude a treaty was meant to be Abraham's quid pro quo for that offer. When the Torah quotes Avimelech as having performed acts of kindness towards Abraham, the Torah reports Avimelech's own version, not an historical fact. Isaac, on the other hand, did remain in the land of the Philistines, prospering greatly during his sojourn there. When the Torah reports Avimelech as going to Isaac from Gerar this means "on account of the legal situation deriving from Isaac's stay in Gerar." Abra-

ham had not accepted Avimelech's offer at the time, and could therefore annul his oath without the presence (agreement) of Avimelech. The fact that Isaac did accept Avimelech's offer, made it impossible for him to annul Abraham's covenant without the presence (agreement) of Avimelech.

We may assume that Abraham did not agree with the approach of the Ri when Avimelech made Abraham swear the covenant but agreed with the approach of Maimonides. The latter writes in Hilchot Shevuot chapter 6 that whoever makes his fellow man render an oath cannot annul such an undertaking unless the other party is present even though he had not received any benefit from the party requesting the oath. Maimonides does agree, however, that if this provision was ignored the annulment is still valid precisely because the party who swore never received any benefit from his opposite number. Later halachic authorities such as the Raa'vad, Rashba and others feel that such an annulment is not valid even ipso facto, i.e. בדיעבד. Avimelech wanted to cover all his bases and therefore went to Isaac and took with him Phichol and Achuzat to lend added strength to the agreement to be forged, as we shall explain.

And Achuzat and Phichol, etc. We need to know why Avimelech had to take these two people with him, something he had not done when he made a covenant with Abraham.

We may understand this with the help of a comment by Ran in Nedarim 65. He expresses doubt as to the ruling about the affected party having to be present when the vow is revoked unless the vow was designed originally to be of benefit to the party becoming its subject. [King Zedekiah (Chronicles II 36,13 as interpreted by the Talmud Nedarim 65), had vowed not to reveal the fact that he had observed king Nebuchadnezzar eat a raw hare. Had this fact become common knowledge, Nebuchadnezzar's image would have suffered amongst his subjects. Zedekiah therefore should not have had his vow annulled without the presence (consent) of Nebuchadnezzar, seeing such annulment was to his detriment. Ed.] Ran quotes unnamed sources who hold that the whole rule of requiring the consent (presence) of the second party is valid only if the second party would suffer embarassment if the party who made the vow originally now wants to annul it. Other authorities hold, however, that the reason for the rule is to ensure that the second party does not inadvertently commit a sin by not being aware that the vow had been annulled. According to the latter view, when the vow had not conferred a benefit upon the second party, it suffices to inform the second party, his presence or consent is not required. According to the former view the affected party's presence (consent) would be required as a condition for such annulment to become valid.

Avimelech may have been astute enough to try and prevent Isaac from annulling his (or his father's) vow by converting the covenant made with Abraham (in private) into a covenant made in public. We have learned in Gittin 46 that according to the view of Rabbi Yehudah a vow made in public can never be annulled. On folio 36 the Talmud quotes the opinion of Amemar that even according to the view that vows made in public are subject to annulment this is so only when the vow was not made with the consent of the people present at the time such vow was made. Tossaphot explain that Amemar does not necessarily disagree with the view of Rabbi Yehudah that publicly made vows are not subject to annulment. It emerges from the opinion expressed by Rav Yoseph in Pessachim 107 that the discussion is resolved in favour of the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, whereas at the end of the discussion the other rabbis rule in favour of the opinion expressed by the Rabbanan. Later authorities, i.e. the Geonim, again rule in favour of Rabbi Yehudah. At any rate, Avimelech took along an entourage, i.e. Achuzat and others in order to make the vow they wanted Isaac to undertake qualify as an oath made in public and therefore not subject to annulment at any future time. Our rabbis in Gittin disagree on how many people must be present in order for such a vow to be considered "public." Rabbi Nachman holds that the presence of three people suffices, whereas Rabbi Yitzchok holds that there has to be a quorum of ten people. After perusing what our sages have written on this subject in Bereshit Rabbah 64,2 concerning the meaning of ואחוזת מרעהו, I found that Rabbi Yehudah defines the meaning as simply the name of the person, whereas Rabbi Nechemyah understands it as a procession of wellwishers. Perhaps the disagreement mentioned in that Midrash is parallel to the disagreement whether three or ten people are required in order to qualify a vow as having been made in public. At any rate we may view Avimelech as having made sure that sufficient people were present to make Isaac's vow irrevocable.

Perhaps Avimelech was so astute that he wanted to ensure that the presence of his army commander Phichol, who represented all the military, would make the vow one that had been made על דעת רבים, "with the consent of many," not merely "in the presence of many."

The same two rabbis who disagreed in Bereshit Rabbah 64,9 on the meaning of ואחוזת מרעהו also disagree on the meaning of the word פיכל. Rabbi Yehudah considers the word as merely his name, whereas Rabbi Nechemyah sees in it a description of his function, i.e. that פי כל, he was the authority to whom all the soldiers owed obeisance. The argument between the two rabbis may have the same root, i.e. whether in order to make a vow into a public vow one requires the presence of three or ten people respectively. The plain meaning of the Torah seems to be that three people suffice; this is why if we accept the meaning of Rabbi Yehudah, Avimelech took two people along for the ceremony. According to the view that a quorum of ten is required to make the vow a public oath we would have to interpret the verse according to the opinion of Rabbi Nechemyah in which case Avimelech took along quite a number of people, i.e. a minimum of ten. At the same time Avimelech may have wanted the oath to qualify as approved by a quorum of at least ten people, as we described earlier.

26:27 *Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?"*

OR HACHAIM

Issac said to them, etc. We have to understand why Isaac spoke to the king and his entourage in such a hostile manner. It seems incompatible with our image of Isaac. Besides, seeing that in the end he did make a covenant with them, what was the point of the hostile attitude Isaac displayed initially? Furthermore, once Isaac had told Avimelech and company that they hated him, why did he spell out how this hatred had expressed itself, i.e. by his being expelled from Gerar? If the latter sentence was meant to prove the Philistines' hatred of him, he should have said כישלחתם אותי, when you expelled me instead of ותשלחוני מאתכם, suggesting that they let him go unmolested?

We must understand Isaac's words as reflecting his awareness that the only reason Avimelech displayed any interest in making an agreement with Isaac was his concern that possibly his own inheritance would be in jeopardy due to G'd's promise to Abraham of the whole land of Canaan. Abraham had already reassured Avimelech about those concerns and Isaac his son would certainly not be able to annul a promise made by his father. There was therefore no reason for Avimelech to approach Isaac in this matter. Isaac reasoned as Maimonides rules that vows undertaken with the consent of the other party cannot be revoked except with that party's consent. Since Abraham had not done so during his lifetime it was too late for Isaac to make any changes, anyways (based on Job 37,18). Under the circumstances Avimelech had no need of Isaac at all. When Isaac said: "why did you come?" this is not to be understood as a hostile statement, but as pointing out that there was no need for them to come all the way in order to request what they were about to ask. Seeing this was so, he could only assume that they had come for his sake, presumably in order to lure him back to Gerar. He alluded to this by using the word אלי, to me. This was hard to believe, however, in view of past hostility shown him. He added the word ואתם, and you, referring to Avimelech and his ministers personally; he meant that it was not just the population at large which had displayed hatred towards him. By using the word ותשלחוני, Isaac meant that their hatred of him was based on jealousy. It is a well known fact that hatred may evaporate unless it is caused by jealousy. Hatred based on jealousy will not abate until the cause (Isaac) of the jealousy has disappeared. Isaac challenged Avimelech that their hatred of him would not disappear as it was based on jealousy.

26:28 *And they said, "We now see plainly that the LORD has been with you, and we thought: Let there be a sworn treaty between our two parties, between you and us. Let us make a pact with you*

OR HACHAIM

We have seen very clearly, etc. Why did Avimelech and company repeat: "we have seen, seen?" There are also other nuances in their remarks which we need to analyse.

Basically, Avimelech and company responded to Isaac's questions by saying that they really intended to respond to all Isaac had said. As to the covenant concluded between Abraham and Avimelech they said: "we have seen,seen." They claimed that there were two reasons why they could not rely on Abraham's vow. One was, as we stated, that Abraham's vow was made in private, the other that Abraham had not been a beneficiary of Avimelech and thus was at liberty to annul his vow even without Avimelech's presence or consent. Furthermore, they said that they did realise that only when they renewed said covenant with Isaac would he consider his father's vow as binding and ironclad. Avimelech added that when he concluded his covenant with Abraham he had not been careful to do it in such a way that it would remain irrevocable.

Should Isaac be angered that Avimelech had not bothered to secure similar guarantees from his brother Ishmael who was, after all, Abraham's elder son, they explained this by saying they had observed that it ws Isaac who was both personally powerful and obviously enjoyed G'd's blessing and support. Although Isaac had pointed out that the fact they had expelled him was a sign of their hatred for him, they had convinced themselves that if he was worthy of G'd's blessing there was no cause to hate him.

Concerning Isaac's complaint that they had not been honest with him and that it was an effrontery therefore to ask him for favours, ראו ראינו, they felt intellectually that the permanent validity of the covenant with Abraham would be guaranteed only if they renewed it at this time. I shall forthwith explain how we can read all this out of their carefully chosen words.

we said: "let there be an oath between us, etc. The word ונאמר is past tense. They now began to explain the reason they had expelled Isaac from Gerar; as long as Isaac remained with them in Gerar it was legally impossible for the oath they had in mind to become irrevocable. We learn in Nedarim 27 that it is permissible to revoke certain vows without the need to appear before a tribunal. Examples are vows which were made under pressure from people who are reputed to commit murder in order to enrich themselves, or when facing robbers intent merely on confiscating one's property, or when facing tax collectors who exceed their authority. The school of Hillel taught that even when such vows were phrased as an oath, no legal mechanism is required to revoke them (when the danger is over). Concerning the above Mishnah, Maha'rik writes in Yore De-ah 232, that "anyone who swears an oath or makes a vow under duresss, such oath or vow is not legally binding." It suffices to annul such vows or oaths in one's heart; Joseph, however, did not annul his vow concerning his promise to Pharaoh not to reveal that the latter did not understand the Hebrew language, nor did Zedekiah annul his promise to Nebuchadnezzar in his heart. This ruling is valid even if the person who made the vow had been compensated in some form for the vow he was about to make. Avimelech and his company were afraid that Isaac might invoke this ruling to free himself of any vow if such an undertaking were to be made while he was in Avimelech's territory, i.e. under his rule, and therefore under some kind of duress. Therefore they came to a place over which Avimelech had no authority so that any undertaking by Isaac would be completely voluntary and therefore binding upon him. This is also clear from the writings of Nachmanides on the subject. The words תהי נא were meant to emphasise that the covenant to be undertaken now was to be different from the one previous in that it would remain valid, i.e. תהי. When they claimed at the time they expelled Isaac that he had become too powerful, this had only been a pretext to make him leave; their true reason had been to create a situation in which Isaac's oath would be binding upon him. They may also have used that pretext so that Isaac could not try to dissuade them by telling them that their fears that he would not honour his commitment were unfounded. There were some other considerations which I will come back to later.

between us, i.e. between us and you. The reason they added the apparently unnecessary word בינותינו was to reinforce the existing agreement concluded with Abraham, and to add a new covenant with Isaac. They wanted to examine whether Isaac considered the agreement with Abraham as valid for him. Perhaps Avimelech was afraid that G'd would renew His promise to give the land of Palestine to Isaac and the latter would give part of his inheritance to Esau. Avimelech did not consider Esau as the seed of Abraham seeing that G'd had specificaly said to Abraham that כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע, that only part of Isaac's seed would be considered Abraham's seed (21,12). Should Isaac then decide to give the land of the Philistines to Esau, he, Avimelech,

would not have a legal leg to stand on in a dispute with Isaac, seeing that the covenant with Abraham which covered Abraham's descendants down to his great-grandchildren would not have been breached thereby. Esau would argue that his inheritance was due to a promise made by G'd to his father Isaac, not through a promise made by G'd to Abraham who had delayed it from becoming effective for four generations. These were the considerations which prompted Avimelech to make Isaac swear a separate oath. According to Rashi the word בינותינו alluded to the validity of the agreement for several generations.

This word may also allude to the fact that Avimelech wanted the undertaking to be a public one. The repetition of the word בינינו was meant to emphasise the mutual agreement that prevailed at the time of the new covenant and which would make any future attempt to revoke it subject to mutual agreement.

26:29 *that you will not do us harm, just as we have not molested you but have always dealt kindly with you and sent you away in peace. From now on, be you blessed of the LORD!"*

RAMBAN

IF THOU WILT DO US HURT, AS WE HAVE NOT TOUCHED THEE. The king is saying: "If you will do us hurt [and we could do nothing against you], just as we have not touched you because thou art now the blessed of the Eternal and we do not have it in our power to harm you, the time will yet change on account of the violence you will do against us and you will need to return to our land. Then we will requite you accordingly." The meaning of the phrase, We have not touched thee, is: "We did not persuade our hearts concerning your wife, causing her to be touched by one of them." This is similar in expression to the verse, He that toucheth this man or his wife. "We have done thee nothing but good, guarding whatever you had, by our commanding the people to beware of you. And we have sent thee away in peace for even when we were jealous of you we took nothing of all the wealth you amassed with us, and we sent you away in peace with all you had." The reason for their being fearful of him could hardly have been the apprehension of the king of the Philistines lest Isaac come to war against him. Instead, it was because Abraham had promised them a covenant, "to him, to his son, and his son's son," and now they thought, "Since we annulled our covenant with Isaac and sent him away from us, he too will annul his covenant with us, and his children will drive our children from the land." This was why they made a new covenant with him, excusing themselves by telling him that they did not annul the first covenant, since they have done him nothing but good. And this is the meaning of their saying, Let there now be an oath between us: "We will now come with you in oath to express a ban upon whoever will transgress the covenant." This is similar in meaning to the verse, That thou shouldst enter into the covenant of the Lord thy G-d, and into His oath. It is possible that Abraham was very great and mighty in power, having in his household three hundred men that drew sword, and also many confederates; and he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, and he chased after four powerful kings and subdued them. When they saw Abraham's success which clearly was from G-d, the king of the Philistines was then fearful of him lest he conquer his kingdom, since this would be easier than the war against the four kings. Perhaps the king of the Philistines had also heard the matter of G-d having given the land to Abraham. Hence he made a covenant with him, making him swear that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son, it being considered an act of falsehood if Abraham were to rebel against the king, and considering it possible that Abraham might live until his grandson will rule, [he also mentioned my sons's son]. And as the fathers are, so are the sons. Isaac was as great as his father, and the king therefore feared lest Isaac war against him because he had driven him from his land.

OR HACHAIM

if you will do with us, etc. They were careful to include in the wording of the covenant that it was in recognition of favours they had done to Isaac, whereas they referred to the eventuality that Isaac might reciprocate by doing harm to them. This is the reason that the whole verse is worded so unusually, as if it had been interrupted in the middle. The words "if you will do evil with us" should by rights have been part of the previous verse, providing the rationale for Avimelech seeking this agreement.

When you keep in mind what we have said, it becomes clear that the words are in their proper place, however. Avimelech and company stressed that just as they had not done any harm to Isaac in the past they now expected him to swear that he in turn would not do something that would harm them in the future. Isaac could not be expected to understand what they meant by the טוב, the good they had done for him, until they explained that the very fact that they let him depart whole in body and assets was in itself an act of kindness. Kings, i.e. governments, sometimes pass legislation to extend financial aid to some of their subjects. They do so for one of two reasons. 1) If the day would come when the government is in need of financial aid they would have wealthy citizens to call upon to provide loans to the government. 2) In order to enhance the economic standing of their countries. A country which contains many wealthy people thereby adds to the glory of its rulers. As a result one could have argued that any favours Avimelech had done for Isaac were not of an altruistic nature but were designed to enhance the king's personal reputation as a ruler over a successful country. Avimelech denied such an interpretation of his motives by saying: "just as we never harmed you," meaning that there were no selfish motives in that part of the טוב they had done for Isaac. The very fact they had let Isaac depart with all his assets intact [and had not imposed an emigration tax Ed.] had made Avimelech's country poorer. According to their reasoning this proved that every kindness they had shown Isaac had been genuine, not self-interest. All of this was alluded to in the words ראו ראינו.

[At this point the author quotes a line he saw in Bereshit Rabbah according to which Avimelech's words are proof that the Philistines did not do Isaac any true favours. He finds this difficult and deals with it. Since I have not found such a line in my edition of Bereshit Rabbah, I have omitted this paragraph. Ed.]

you are now the one who is blessed by the Lord. They had come to this realisation when they saw that Isaac continued to prosper in spite of having been expelled from their midst. Seeing that Isaac had not been deprived of any of the favours they used to bestow on him as a result of their having expelled him, he had no reason not to render the oath they requested from him as a quid pro quo.

The author argues that in spite of the definition of the Rivash that what constitutes an oath which is rendered as a quid pro quo is the favour which is rendered at the time of the oath, the same holds true if the oath was sworn in recognition of favours received previously.

Avimelech also wanted to explain with this statement why they did not invite Isaac to return to Gerar. Seeing that after leaving Gerar Isaac had prospered even more than while he had been there, there was no point to invite him to come back there. Previously it could have been argued that he was the beneficiary of the help of G'd extended by means of intermediaries such as the local government in Gerar, i.e. Avimelech himself. Now that he lived in no-man's land it was clear that his success was due entirely to G'd's direct help.

Avimelech also wanted to deny the argument that they had caused Isaac's good fortune to be interrupted by their expulsion; this could not have been the case seeing that G'd had been its author. The fact that he was still better off today than when he resided amongst them was the proof; עתה ברוך ה', "now that they had already done all that was in their power with the means at their disposal, it was clear that he was blessed by the Lord" since he had found the real source of such blessing. All these arguments were designed to elicit an oath the legality of which would be unassailable under any circumstances. There is a discussion in Gittin 46 why the Jewish people did not make war against the Gibeonites when they found out that the latter had tricked them into a promise to treat them as allies instead of as Canaanites (Joshua 9,18). Rabbi Yehudah holds that since the oath was sworn by the leaders of the Jewish people, Israel could not take action denying the validity of that oath. The other rabbis disagree, claiming that the Israelites' undertaking was never valid as it had been based on the Gibeonites' declaration that they were a people who lived far from the land of Canaan. Clearly, Rabbi Yehudah was concerned with the image of Jewish leaders who by defaulting on an undertaking denigrate the reputation of G'd whom they represent. Rashi explains that Rabbi Yehudah's point is not that the oath was valid, but that the Gentiles must not be allowed to say that Jewish leaders were guilty of perjury. We must remember that Rabbi Yehudah's point is not a legal one, i.e. a Mosaic law, but an act of piety that Jewish leaders have to impose upon themselves. Besides, even according to Rabbi Yehudah, such a consideration is in place only when the oath was as public as that of the Jewish people to the Gibeonites. Oaths between a relatively small group of people such as Isaac and Avimelech's entourage would certainly not fall under that heading.

Furthermore, an additional reason why the other rabbis disagreed with Rabbi Yehudah is that the Gentiles are well aware of the mechanics and the conditions when oaths are subject to annulment. This being so, the question of חלול השם, public desecration of G'd's name which troubled Rabbi Yehudah did not even arise.

חמישי FIFTH ALIYAH

26:32 *That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug, and said to him, "We have found water!"*

RAMBAN

AND ISAAC's SERVANTS CAME AND TOLD HIM CONCERNING THE WELL WHICH THEY HAD DIGGED. This is the same well mentioned above in the verse, And there Isaac's servants digged a well. They had begun to dig it, and Abimelech came to him during that period, and on the day of the making of the covenant, when Abimelech and his retinue had left, Isaac's servants brought him the tidings that they had found water. It appears feasible to me that this is the same well which Abraham dug, in connection with which he gave Abimelech seven lambs as a witness [to his ownership of the well]. The Philistines, however, stopped it together with the other wells, whereupon Isaac dug it again and called it by the same name which his father had called it. It is for this reason that the name of the city is Beersheba: on account of the well (be'er) which both the father and the son called by that name because there they swore both of them. This well of theirs alludes to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, which the Philistines stopped when the Ark of G-d was taken captive by them. And they redug it, indicating that the Philistines indeed returned the Ark together with the honorary gift to G-d.

27:1 *When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am."*

OR HACHAIM

It came about when Isaac was old, etc. The reason that the Torah prefaces the paragraph by reporting that Isaac's eyesight failed him was to explain that Jacob took the blessings at a time when he was not afraid that his father would recognise him. The reason the paragraph is introduced with the word ויהי, which always introduces a painful episode, is to remind us that the subterfuge Jacob had to employ had many fateful consequences for the history of the Jewish people.

Esau. The reason the Torah does not say ויקרא אל עשו, that Isaac called out to Esau, is that the latter was not present. Isaac merely called out Esau's name.

his older son. The Torah may have given as the reason that Isaac called first on Esau the fact that he was the firstborn; this would presuppose that Isaac did not know about the sale of the birthright. Alternatively, Isaac may have ignored the fact of the sale of the birthright and have based himself on Esau's being the elder, biologically speaking. The reason that Isaac wanted to give the wicked Esau a blessing was that he hoped to effect a change in Esau's character on account of the blessings he would bestow on him. In view of the statement in Bereshit Rabbah 80,1 that Dinah's rape was a punishment for Jacob who had hidden her from Esau's view at the moment of reconciliation, thus preventing Esau from marrying her, we may assume that had Rebeccah and Jacob not interfered with Isaac's intention Esau might indeed have become a penitent as a result of receiving such a blessing.

27:4 *Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die."*

RAMBAN

THAT MY SOUL MAY BLESS THEE. It was Isaac's intent to bless Esau that he merit the blessing of Abraham to inherit the land and to become the one with whom G-d would make the covenant since he was the firstborn. It would appear that Rebekah never told Isaac of the prophecy which G-d had related to her, i.e., And the elder shall serve the younger, else how would Isaac transgress the commandment of the Eternal, seeing that it shall not prosper. Now at first she did not tell it to him due to ethical modesty, for the verse, And she went to inquire of the Eternal, suggests that she went without Isaac's permission. [Perhaps she did not tell him because] she said, "I need not re-

late a prophecy to a prophet for Isaac is greater than the one who told it to me." And now she did not want to tell him, "So was it said to me in the name of G-d before I gave birth," for she reasoned that because of his love for Esau he will not bless Jacob, but he will leave everything in the hands of Heaven. And she further knew that by this arrangement of hers, Jacob will be blessed from Isaac's mouth by an undivided heart and a willing mind. Perhaps these are causes induced by G-d so that Jacob would be blessed, and Esau as well with the blessing of the sword, And by Him alone actions are weighed.

27:5 *Rebekah had been listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau had gone out into the open to hunt game to bring home,*

OR HACHAIM

and Rebeccah was listening, etc. The Torah tells us that Rebeccah was a prophetess who always listened to Isaac's words even though she did not speak up in his presence. The. Torah alludes to this by saying ורבקב שומעת בדבר יצחק, "Rebeccah was listening whenever Isaac spoke." Normally we would have expected the Torah to write: ותשמע רבקה, "Rebeccah happened to overhear." The present tense employed here by the Torah here is most unusual. Maybe Isaac spoke to Esau in a whisper and that is why he believed that Jacob was really Esau; Isaac thought that Jacob could not have have heard of Isaac's instructions to Esau. Although Isaac's eyesight had begun to fail him, he called Esau to help him with something confidentially. Both Isaac's call and Esau's response, "I am ready" may be an allusion to the conspirational nature of the conversation.

27:6 *Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "I overheard your father speaking to your brother Esau, saying,*

OR HACHAIM

And Rebeccah said to Jacob, etc. The reason that the Torah introduces the verse with the conjunctive letter ו is to tell us that Rebeccah agreed with the Holy Spirit which had conveyed this conversation between Isaac and Esau to her.

to say, "here I have heard," etc. She wanted to make sure that Jacob realised that she had only just become aware of what had transpired between Isaac and Esau and that she could not be accused of having allowed too much time to elapse to take countermeasures. Jacob had enough time to carry out his mother's instructions.

your brother, saying. She did not mean that Esau was a true brother of Jacob in character; she used the word "your brother" to indicate that just as Isaac plotted with Esau, she now did the same thing with Jacob.

She also used the word לאמר to protect herself since she had not quoted Isaac's words to Jacob verbatim. She meant that she had told Jacob the gist of Isaac's words to Esau.

27:7 *'Bring me some game and prepare a dish for me to eat, that I may bless you, with the LORD's approval, before I die.'*

RAMBAN

AND I WILL BLESS THEE BEFORE THE ETERNAL BEFORE MY DEATH. In this entire section, the expression, before the Eternal, is not mentioned except in this place. This is because his mother said to Jacob, "The blessing will be before the Eternal with the Ruach Hakodesh, and if Esau your brother be blessed with it, it will remain with his children forever, and you will have no standing before him."

27:8 *Now, my son, listen carefully as I instruct you.*

OR HACHAIM

and now my son, listen to me and obey my instructions! "hasten to bring me two young kids at once."

listen to my voice! Although there is some deception involved in what I will instruct you, you still have to obey me apart from your duty to honour father and mother which is a positive commandment. Rebeccah stressed the fact that she was a prophetess and the Torah commands us to obey the prophets' instructions (Deut. 18,15). We have already explained (in connection with Genesis 16,5) that when a prophet asks you to disobey one of G'd's laws temporarily he is to be obeyed.

27:12 *If my father touches me, I shall appear to him as a trickster and bring upon myself a curse, not a blessing."*

RAMBAN

PERHAPS MY FATHER WILL FEEL ME. The reason that Isaac will feel him is not for the purpose of recognition. Instead, Jacob said, "Perhaps he will bring me near him to kiss me or to put his hand on my face in the manner of a father demonstrating affection for his son, and in feeling me he will discover that I am smooth." Now I wonder why Jacob was not afraid of vocal recognition for all people are recognizable by their voice as our Rabbis have said, "How is a blind man permitted to live with his wife? And how are people permitted to live with their wives at nighttime? Only by vocal recognition." Now if ordinary people have such power of recognition, what of Isaac, who was wise and expert in distinguishing between his sons? He should truly have the power of recognition by voice. Perhaps the brothers had similar voices, and therefore the Sages said that the verse, The voice is the voice of Jacob, refers not to Jacob's voice but to his words, i.e., that he speaks gentle language and mentions the Name of Heaven. It may be that he altered his voice in order to speak as his brother did, for there are people who know how to do this.

27:13 *But his mother said to him, "Your curse, my son, be upon me! Just do as I say and go fetch them for me."*

OR HACHAIM

may your curse be on me my son! The reason that she added the word "my son," although she had been talking to him all the time was that she referred only to what Jacob had said last. We have a rule in Makkot 11 that the curse of a Torah scholar, even if uttered only conditionally, is effective. Had Rebeccah not added the word "my son," we would have thought that she referred to Jacob's being cursed by Isaac when he found out he had been tricked.

In order to understand Rebeccah's special love for Jacob the following considerations may help. Rebeccah generally was looked upon askance because she had given birth to the wicked Esau. We find in nature that parts of a whole display an affinity for other parts of the same whole. Rebeccah testified that this rule did not apply in her case, that her deeds proved that she had no affinity for Esau. Her womb was indeed blessed, and the good part (Jacob) represented that which was normal, hence her love for Jacob. The Torah teaches us this by repeatedly describing

Jacob as Rebeccah's son even in instances where these additional words are otherwise quite superfluous (compare verses 6,8,11,13,15,17,42). All of this is to underline that Jacob's righteousness was a direct outgrowth of his righteous mother. The fact that she had given birth also to an Esau was not a reflection on his mother's personality.

Kabbalists, of course, are aware that there are mystical dimensions which account for the emergence of Esau as a potentially wicked person, whereas it was Rebeccah's union with Isaac which was the cause of any pollutant disturbing her holiness. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai is quoted in the Zohar (Sullam edition Chayey Sarah 251) as explaining that the reason the Torah describes Isaac as loving his wife Rebeccah, something that is natural and does not require special mention, is that the love of the male for the female is rooted in the "left" side of the emanations. in Isaac's case it was the fire of the גבורה, his predominant characteristic which stems from the "left side" of the emanations.. If the holiness of the two was tainted in any way this was due more to Isaac than to Rebeccah. Jacob's physical perfection is compared to that of Adam's before the sin, as we know from Baba Metzia 84. He did not therefore inherit any pollutant from his mother. Students of the Kabbalah will understand all this. [I have elaborated on the author's text to make it more intelligible for the non-kabbalist. Ed.] When we wrote earlier (25,20) that the reason that Esau was wicked was because Rebeccah had a wicked brother called Laban, this did not influence Rebeccah's character.

27:15 *Rebekah then took the best clothes of her older son Esau, which were there in the house, and had her younger son Jacob put them on;*

RAMBAN

ESAU HER ELDER SON, JACOB HER YOUNGER SON. The reason why Scripture mentions this is to accentuate the unusual action of the righteous one, for parents customarily give recognition to the firstborn in blessing, honor, and gift, but she, knowing of the righteousness of the younger and the wickedness of the elder, went to all this trouble to transfer the blessing and the honor from the elder to the younger. Similarly, it says further on, And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah, and she sent and called Jacob her younger son.

OR HACHAIM

she dressed Jacob her younger son. This means she adapted these clothes to fit her smaller son though they were tailored to fit the measurements of her bigger son Esau.

27:19 *Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau, your first-born; I have done as you told me. Pray sit up and eat of my game, that you may give me your innermost blessing."*

OR HACHAIM

I am Esau your firstborn. Jacob meant that seeing he had purchased the birthright from Esau, he was now the legal Esau. He added: עשיתי כאשר דברת אלי, "I have done in accordance with what you have said to me," meaning that the reason you told Esau to hunt game, etc., was because you assumed that he was your firstborn.

27:21 *Isaac said to Jacob, "Come closer that I may feel you, my son—whether you are really my son Esau or not."*

RAMBAN

COME NEAR, I PRAY THEE, THAT I MAY FEEL THEE. Rashi comments: "Isaac said to himself, 'It is not Esau's way to have the Name of Heaven so readily in his mouth.'" This interpretation is found in Bereshith Rabbah. But I wonder about this for Esau was not wicked in his father's eyes! Perhaps Isaac thought that since Esau is a man of the field and his heart is set on the hunt, he is not wont to mention the Name of Heaven for fear that he might mention it in some unclean place and without proper concentration. In the eyes of his father, this was considered a manifestation of his fear of Heaven. In line with the simple meaning of Scripture, this was because of vocal recognition.

27:23 *He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; and so he blessed him.*

OR HACHAIM

he did not recognise him since his hands were like those of Esau. Isaac rejected the doubt created by Jacob's voice since a person can change his voice or the listener may mistake a voice for that of someone else, whereas he cannot change the hairs on his hands, a very distinctive mark of identification.

he blessed him. Before Isaac touched Jacob and established that he was Esau nothing had contradicted his impression that it was Jacob's voice he heard and that therefore he was faced by a swindler. Isaac had begun to think along the lines Jacob had been afraid of, i.e. that the swindler deserved to be cursed. Even though Isaac had not yet thought that far, he did begin to hate the person who he thought was trying to swindle him. The Talmud reports in Baba Metzia 84 that when the righteous are looking at someone with displeasure this brings a curse in its wake. [Rabbi Yochanan's displeaure at Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish's remarks resulted in the latter dying. Ed.] The Torah reports Isaac as blessing Jacob as a result of feeling his hands to teach us that he reversed his erstwhile intentions.

27:24 *He asked, "Are you really my son Esau?" And when he said, "I am,"*

OR HACHAIM

He said: "you are indeed my son Esau Isaac justified his bestowing the blessing. This verse is not a question. Jacob's reaction was a confirmation that Isaac was correct, of course.

There is another meaning to the words אתה זה. Inasmuch as Isaac had thought up to that moment that the voice indicated that Jacob stood before him, he now pointed at the body of the person before him saying: "you are Esau" seeing the hands had convinced him. When he articulated the blessings he concentrated on the person opposite him without regard to that person's name. This actually made Jacob the true recipient of the blessings, even though Isaac had made mention of Esau. At the time of the actual blessing Isaac concentrated exclusively on the person in front of him.

27:27 *and he went up and kissed him. And he smelled his clothes and he blessed him, saying, "Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of the fields that the LORD has blessed.*

OR HACHAIM

He blessed him saying: "re-ey. This word does not mean "see!" as usual, but is connected to the word ראוי, suitable, worthy. Isaac meant that it was fitting that the fragrance of his son should reflect the fragrance of the fields which themselves enjoyed G'd's blessings.

שישי SIXTH ALIYAH

27:28 *"May God give you Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, Abundance of new grain and wine.*

RAMBAN

OF THE DEW OF HEAVEN. The blessing is not that G-d give him of the dew of heaven for the dew descends in all places. Now had he said that G-d give him an abundance of dew, or that it come in its season, even as it says, Then I will give your rains in their season, that would have constituted a blessing. Instead, its meaning is as follows: Since above he mentioned G-d's blessing, As the odor of a field which the Eternal hath blessed, meaning "which G-d had blessed for my son" — that is, since G-d blessed him in the field by giving him success there in his hunt and by guarding him from death or any mishap — he now says, So G-d give thee, [as an additional blessing], of the dew of heaven, and of the fat places of the earth. It is thus a blessing of addition and abundance. It may be that the expression, And plenty ('verov') of corn and wine, is written in the Torah with an extra vav, [which should not affect the meaning], with the sense of the verse being: "So G-d give thee of the dew of heaven and of the places of the earth, i.e., plenty of corn and wine." In my opinion the correct interpretation is that G-d's gift is steady and there is never any interruption in it. Therefore he says, "So G-d give thee for the extent of your days upon your land of the dew of heaven, and give thee of the fat places of the earth," meaning the fattest of all lands, even as it is written, The beauty of all lands. Now Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra says that the prefix mem in the word mital, (of the dew) applies to itself and yet to another word, [namely, mishmanei (the fat places of the earth), which is then to be understood as] umimishmanei ha'aretz and from the fat places of the earth. To Esau, on the other hand, he gave a blessing which mentions neither through a gift of G-d nor with abundance. Rather he said, "For you too I have reserved a blessing after him: of the fat places of the earth and of the dew of heaven shall your dwelling be." That is "as long as you will dwell there," thereby alluding that he will ultimately be destroyed and lost, for only as long as he will live will his lot be good.

OR HACHAIM

May the Lord give you of the dew of the heavens, etc. The resason this verse commences with the conjunctive letter ו is because it continues the theme begun in verse 27, i.e. ויברכהו, "He blessed him." Those blessings had not been detailed because the Torah merely told us that just as the key to blessings had first been entrusted to Abraham and subsequently by Abraham to Isaac, Isaac now handed this key to Jacob. (based on Bereshit Rabbah 39,11). Accordingly the word ויברכהו means that Isaac transferred this key to blessings to Jacob.

It is also possible that Isaac divided the blessings into both spiritual and material ones. The spiritual blessings are referred to by the word ויברכהו, whereas the material blessings are introduced by verse 28. The letter ו then introduces the material blessings as something additional to the spiritual blessings Isaac had already bestowed upon Jacob.

Aternately, the mention of the word האלוקים, the attribute of Justice, is to show that whereas up to then Isaac had invoked only the attribute of Mercy, he now also invoked the attribute of Justice, asking it to agree to the blessing he bestowed on his son.

27:29 *Let peoples serve you, And nations bow to you; Be master over your brothers, And let your mother's sons bow to you. Cursed be they who curse you, Blessed they who bless you."*

RAMBAN

CURSED BE EVERY ONE THAT CURSETH THEE, AND BLESSED BE EVERY ONE THAT BLESSETH THEE. But in the case of Balaam it says, Blessed be every one that blesseth thee, and cursed be every one that curseth thee. [The reason for this change in order is that] the righteous begin with affliction and ultimately attain tranquility, so that those who curse them precede those who bless them. But the wicked experience tranquility first and their end is affliction. Hence Balaam mentioned the blessing before the curse. This is Rashi's language quoting Bereshith Rabbah. But if this be so, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to Abraham, And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee? This however is no difficulty since He concludes there, And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Thus there is a blessing at the beginning and at the end. It may be, as we have explained it there, that He speaks in terms of both an individual and many, suggesting that Abraham will be universally blessed, and the single person who will curse him will be cursed.

OR HACHAIM

Nations will serve you, etc. This might mean that the king would not impose on the people the taxes due him. We find that even when the second Jewish commonwealth was still a satellite of the Persians, their leaders, i.e. their Torah scholars were exempt from taxes as we know from Ezra, 7,24. When verse 40 continues "and you will serve your brother," this refers to a descendant of Esau when the latter had become king.

Be your brother's superior; This refers to Esau personally, i.e. that Esau himself will never become Jacob's servant, as opposed to some of his descendants to whom the words וישתחוו לך בני אמך, "your mother's sons will bow down to you" will apply.

Another meaning contained in the blessing may be that as long as Jacob will exercise his dominion over Esau by serving the Lord in holiness, the blessing would remain in effect; were he not to do so, one brother could never become a servant to another brother. Should Jacob (or his descendants) fail to serve the Lord, Esau would assume dominion over him. This is why we find that even a relatively mild dereliction of duty towards G'd by the kingdom of Yehudah led to Edom recovering politically (Kings II 8,22).

Those who curse you will be cursed and those who bless you will be blessed. Those who plan to curse you in the future will already be cursed now so as to make their curse ineffective, whereas those who plan to bless you will already be blessed now so as to make their blessing effective.

The reason the Torah employs the plural when referring to those who will bless, whereas the word "will be blessed" is in the singular, (and similarly when referring to the cursers and the cursed) is to tell us that not all those who curse will be cursed, such as in the case of Achiyah Hashiloni and people like him (Kings I 11,29). The same applies in reverse to people such as Bileam who blessed the Jewish people. He was not blessed as a result because his intention was not honourable.

The reason the Torah adds the conjunctive letter ו before the word ומברכיך is to allude to the type of person who curses and is yet within the category of people deserving blessings since he uses the wording of a curse in order to bestow a blessing. We find an example of this in Moed Katan 9 where the Rabbis couched their blessing for Rabbi Eleazar, son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, in words which sounded like a curse. We are therefore able to read the verse as if the three words ארריך ארור ומברכיך belonged together.

27:30 *No sooner had Jacob left the presence of his father Isaac —after Isaac had finished blessing Jacob—than his brother Esau came back from his hunt.*

OR HACHAIM

As soon as he had finished, etc. The reason for the apparently superfluous word ויהי which always introduces something of a painful nature, is that the Torah testifies that Isaac completed his blessing prematurely; instead of giving Jacob the entire blessing he was capable of bestowing as he did for Esau afterwards, he did not do so now. Had Isaac truly completed giving Jacob all the blessings he was capable of bestowing, Esau would have gone out empty-handed.

Jacob had barely left his father's presence, etc. The extra words: אך, יצא, ויהי are all meant to draw our attention to the fact that Jacob would not have left yet except that he noticed that Esau was arriving (as pointed out at the end of the verse). This caused Jacob to make a hasty exit. The Torah hints at the embarassment Jacob felt at leaving the presence of his father as if he were a thief beating a hasty retreat. Our sages in Midrash Rabbah pursue a different approach.

27:32 *His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, Esau, your first-born!"*

RAMBAN

WHO ART THOU? When Esau said to him, Let my father arise, Isaac thought that it was Jacob, i.e., that because Jacob knew that he had eaten of Esau's venison and blessed Esau, he too prepared savory meats so that he should bless him also. Therefore he asked, Who art thou?, in order to know the truth.

27:33 *Isaac was seized with very violent trembling. "Who was it then," he demanded, "that hunted game and brought it to me? Moreover, I ate of it before you came, and I blessed him; now he must remain blessed!"*

RAMBAN

AND ISAAC TREMBLED VERY EXCEEDINGLY, AND SAID, WHO THEN IS HE THAT HATH TAKEN VENISON AND BROUGHT IT TO ME, AND I HAVE EATEN OF ALL BEFORE THOU COMEST AND HAVE BLESSED HIM? YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED. It is not natural for a person who just trembled violently and complained, "Who was it that subtly made me bless him?" to conclude his complaint by immediately saying, Yea, and he shall be blessed! Rather, it would have been proper that he curse him! Moreover, Esau would then complain to his father, saying, "But why do you bless him now, my father?" And how would Esau believe his father that it was originally done through subtlety when he saw that he was now blessing him willingly! The correct interpretation appears to me to be that it is in the present tense. Isaac is saying, "Who then is he that hath hunted venison, who could have beguiled me so that I should bless him and that he should remain blessed under all circumstances for I knew that he is a blessed one?" Or it may be that the expression, Yea, and he shall be blessed, means "against my will, since it is impossible for me to transfer the blessing from him." From the moment he blessed him, Isaac knew by Ruach Hakodesh that his blessings indeed rested upon Jacob. This then is the reason for his violent trembling for he knew that his beloved son Esau had lost his blessing forever. This also is the explanation for his saying, Thy brother came with subtlety, meaning that after he said, Who then is he etc. he realized that Jacob had been the one who came before him to receive the blessing for it would have been impossible for the blessing to rest on any but his offspring, [and, as mentioned above, Isaac knew by Ruach Hakodesh that the blessing had taken effect. Hence he was sure that it was Jacob who had come before him.]

OR HACHAIM

Isaac trembled. Isaac experienced contradictory feelings; he trembled because he had been tricked. At the same time he was aware that he had blessed Jacob by saying that anyone cursing him should himself be cursed. When he understood that the person upon whom he had bestowed the blessing was his son Jacob he blessed him because he realised that the fragrance that emanated from Jacob's clothing indicated his moral superiority over Esau. This prompted Isaac to confirm his blessing. He may also have been afraid to bring a curse upon himself if he were to revoke the blessing.

27:36 *[Esau] said, "Was he, then, named Jacob that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!" And he added, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"*

OR HACHAIM

He said: "Was he not named Jacob (the crooked one)? Esau was amazed having believed that Jacob's name referred to only a single act of subterfuge whereas he now found himself fooled by Jacob for a second time. Had Jacob's name been עקבות or something similar, Esau would not have been so surprised.

Esau may also have meant that the name יעקב alluded to frequent use of subterfuge. So far he considered himself as having become Jacob's victim twice.

27:37 *Isaac answered, saying to Esau, "But I have made him master over you: I have given him all his brothers for servants, and sustained him with grain and wine. What, then, can I still do for you, my son?"*

RAMBAN

AND ALL HIS BRETHREN HAVE I GIVEN HIM AS SERVANTS. This is not the blessing, Be lord over thy brethren, for Isaac had already said, Behold, I have made him thy lord. However, it is possible that Jacob be the lord and they not be his servants, just as the verse says, For Judah 'gavar' above his brethren. But the

source for his saying, I have given to him as servants, comes from his expression, And let thy mother's sons bow down to thee, for this refers to the bowing of the servant to his masters, just as he says, Let people serve thee, and then repeats, And nations bow down to thee. The meaning of the expression, And all his brothers, is the same as that of thy brothers and thy mother's sons. These he mentions in the plural in order to allude to all of Esau's offspring. And Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra says that it refers to the children of Abraham's concubines.

OR HACHAIM

Isaac replied. Actually Isaac still had the chance to bless Esau. Having realised in the meantime that Esau deserved a curse rather than a blessing, that he was in fact an enemy of his brother Jacob, Isaac was afraid to bless Esau because he would thereby neutralise the blessing to Jacob that those who curse him would themselves be cursed. The Torah therefore mentions the expression ויען יצחק twice to tell us that he did not tell Esau the true reason why he could not bless him outright.

27:39 *And his father Isaac answered, saying to him, "See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth And the dew of heaven above.*

RAMBAN

BEHOLD ('HINEI'), OF THE FAT PLACES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE THY DWELLING. The intent of the word hinei (behold) is: "Now I could give you of the fat places of the earth and of the dew of heaven, for of these there is sufficient [abundance] for both of you to have of the fat places of the earth and of the dew of heaven, but in the matter of lordship, that will be his, and you shall serve him." Isaac also did not give him plenty of corn and wine as he gave to his brother since he wanted to honor the one who had been blessed first above him. Later he said to Jacob, And G-d Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham... that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, meaning that he should have the plentifulness of the corn and wine in the land of Canaan, which was Abraham's gift, while Esau would have the dew and the fat places of the earth in another land.

OR HACHAIM

Isaac his father replied. The words "his father" explain why Isaac decided to give Esau a blessing after all. In the final analysis his fatherly feelings were stirred by Esau's outburst.

27:40 *Yet by your sword you shall live, And you shall serve your brother; But when you grow restive, You shall break his yoke from your neck."*

RAMBAN

AND ON THY SWORD ('VE'AL CHARBECHA') YOU SHALL LIVE. The meaning of ve'al charbecha is as if it were written, becharbecha (by thy sword). A similar case is the verse, For man does not live 'al halechem' (on bread) alone, which means belechem (by bread). Now the blessing is not that he live on the booty he takes from his enemies by the sword, for he has already given him of the fat places of the earth and of the dew of heaven by which he shall live. Instead, the purport of the blessing is that he survive his battles and be victorious, and not fall by the sword of an enemy. It is for this reason that immediately following this he said, And thou shall serve thy brother, meaning, "but you will not prevail over him. Instead, he will prevail over you."

AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS WHEN THOU SHALL BREAK LOOSE in thy suffering on account of Jacob's transgression, THEN THOU SHALT SHAKE HIS YOKE FROM OFF THY NECK. This is an indication to Israel that they should not contend with the children of Esau too much in order to do them evil. This is what Scripture commanded: Take ye good heed, contend not with them, etc. And so did our Rabbis say: "For Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had cut off every male in Edom. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David, 'I said, Contend not with them, and you did contend. By your life, these six months will not accrue to you and your reign.' We know this was fulfilled since it is written, And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years, but in truth he reigned six more months, as it is written, In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months." The Rabbis also said, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to David, 'Thy hands are sharp and pointed, and I seek to rule my world with them, etc'"

OR HACHAIM

...והיה כאשר תריד ופרקת עלו. "And your brother...but when you will grieve, you will be able to shake off his yoke. There are many explanations on this verse. It is possible to say that all the blessings of Esau are applicable only as long as Esau is content to serve his brother but not when Esau would try and shake off the yoke of serving his brother. The word תריד may also be derived from the root רדה. It would then mean that once Esau was persecuted and subjugated by Jacob he would begin to shake off Jacob's yoke; at a still later stage the prophecy of "the house of Jacob becoming fire and the house of Esau turning to straw" would be fulfilled (compare Ovadiah 1,18). The reason that the word והיה which signifies a happy occurrence is used may lend support to this interpretation. Esau's destruction would cause joy both in heaven and on earth.

Alternately, the meaning could be that even when Esau dominates the rest of the world, his dominion will not extend over Jacob (the Jewish people) except inasmuch as he will not be dominated by Jacob. He himself will not dominate Jacob. There would be a stand-off between Israel and Edom.

27:41 *Now Esau harbored a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing which his father had given him, and Esau said to himself, "Let but the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Jacob."*

RAMBAN

AND ESAU SAID IN HIS HEART. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra said, "It is possible that he revealed his secret to one of his friends." But this is not necessarily so for any decision which a person reaches after deliberation is referred to in Hebrew as "speaking with the heart," even when it also includes speech with the lips. A similar case is found in the verse, And with a double heart do they speak, for the will is synonymous with the heart. And all Israel were of one heart to make David king, meaning that they had all arrived at the same decision and were talking of it. Similarly, And Jeroboam said in his heart. Similarly did Eliezer say, And before I had finished speaking in my heart, whereas the prayer there was with his lips, as Scripture states, And he said, O Eternal G-d of my lord Abraham. However it is possible that the expression, before I had finished speaking in my heart, means "before I had concluded the thought in my mind." Now here the verse states that when the great hatred of Jacob permeated Esau's soul because of the blessing, he conceived the

idea of murdering his brother, and with this he comforted himself from his depressed state. This explains the verse, And the words of Esau were told to Rebekah. This is why she said to Jacob, Thy brother Esau comforts himself to slay thee. Now Rashi comments, "She was told, through Ruach Hakodesh, what Esau was thinking in his heart." And so it is found in Bereshith Rabbah. If so, Esau's words and thoughts were only in his heart, just as in the verse, I spoke with my own heart. The reason that Esau said, Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand then will I slay my brother is because he would not bring grief to his father during his lifetime. Perhaps it was due to his fear lest his father curse him, and his blessing would then turn into a curse. Rebekah, [who nevertheless advised Jacob to flee], feared that perhaps the elderly one would die suddenly, and Esau would then kill Jacob, or perhaps he might find occasion to kill him even during Isaac's lifetime.

OR HACHAIM

the days of mourning for my father are not far off. Esau referred to the time after his father's funeral when the days of mourning commence. He was afraid to murder Jacob before his father would be buried since the dead are reputed to be aware of what goes on as long as the grave or coffin has not been sealed (Shabbat 152).

27:42 *When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you.*

RAMBAN

AND SHE SENT AND CALLED JACOB. The meaning thereof is that Jacob was in another place, not in the tent of his father and mother, since he was hiding from his brother Esau who was complaining about him, and he was ashamed or afraid of him.

HE DOTH COMFORT HIMSELF ('LECHA') TO SLAY THEE. "He comforts himself for the loss of the blessings by killing you." Thus the language of Rashi. But the simple interpretation is that "he comforts himself with you." Similar cases [of the letter lamed having the meaning of a beth] are found in the verses, Thou hast chosen the son of Jesse, And he took hold of him, and many similar cases. Perhaps the interpretation is that "he is comforting himself concerning you," just as in the verses: And the men of the place asked him of his wife; And he fell on his face; For the king had so commanded concerning him. Onkelos, however, translates it as kemin lecha, meaning, "he lies in wait for you." It would appear from his opinion that the meaning of the Hebrew expression, mithnachem lecha, is that "Esau effects the appearance of having been consoled about the matter of the blessings as if he no longer cares for them, but in truth he lies in wait for you and acts this way so that you should not be on guard." Now Onkelos translated according to the intent of the verse but not according to the language.

OR HACHAIM

her elder son Esau. The reason she used the word הגדול "the bigger one," instead of הבכיר, "the older one", was because she was describing Esau's relative prowess compared to the physically smaller Jacob.

consoles himself concerning you. The thought of killing you acts as consolation for him regarding what you have done to him. By killing you he means to restore to himself both the birthright and the blessing.

27:43 *Now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to Haran, to my brother Laban.*

OR HACHAIM

and now my son, etc. This has to be understood in the same vein as the statement by our sages that one should be a penitent a day before one's death (Avot 2,10). Rebeccah reminded Jacob that no one is assured of his life for even a single day. As a result one must always be penitent. This is why she chose the expression "now." קום ברח, "arise and flee!" She urged Jacob to flee at once although Esau had indicated he would not murder Jacob until after his father's death. Rebeccah was afraid that Isaac might die at any time, thus enabling Esau to try and carry out his evil intention.

Flee to Laban. Laban would stand up against Esau if the latter were to pursue Jacob in order to kill him.

27:44 *Stay with him a while, until your brother's fury subsides —*

OR HACHAIM

until such time as your brother's anger subsides. Anger has a habit of cooling with the passage of time. The reason that Rebeccah continued to belabour the same point in verse 45 was that she knew that the mere passage of time would not be enough to bring about the desired cooling off of Esau's anger. Until such time as Esau would not become furious when others mentioned what had happened there was no knowing if it would be safe for Jacob to return home.

I will send and fetch you. She did not want Jacob to risk returning under any circumstances until she would send for him.

27:45 *until your brother's anger against you subsides—and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will fetch you from there. Let me not lose you both in one day!"*

OR HACHAIM

both of you on the same day. Rebeccah said to Jacob: "even assuming that Esau would die in an act of self defense by you or an act of revenge by a relative of yours this would not give me any satisfaction at all." Rebeccah's concern was only for the life of Jacob; she did not care about Esau at all.

27:46 *Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from among the native women, what good will life be to me?"*

OR HACHAIM

I am fed up with my life. She did not want to reveal the true reason for her state of mind because it is forbidden to tell tales. This is why she gave Isaac a different reason for wanting Jacob sent away. When she had revealed Esau's intention to Jacob this was not tale-bearing but was fulfilment of the commandment in the second half of the verse dealing with tale bearing, "do not stand idly by when the blood of your fellow man is being shed" (Leviticus 19,16).

שביעי SEVENTH ALIYAH

28:5 *Then Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.*

RAMBAN

THE BROTHER OF REBEKAH, JACOB's AND ESAU's MOTHER. Because it stated that Isaac commanded Jacob to get a wife from the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother, Scripture mentions that he was also the brother of Esau's mother. It would have been proper for Isaac to have commanded Esau likewise, but since he knew that the blessing of Abraham would apply only to Jacob and his seed, he did so only to Jacob. Now Scripture further mentions that Esau heard that his father had commanded Jacob not to take a wife from among the daughters of Canaan and that he should go to his mother's brother Laban. He [Esau] heeded his father's will that one not take a wife from among the daughters of Canaan, but he did not act properly and take a wife from the daughters of Laban, despite his [Laban's] being his mother's brother. Scripture further mentions that he took her besides his former wives, and he did not divorce the evil wives since he followed his heart's desire more than he followed the will of his father.

OR HACHAIM

Isaac sent away, etc. Why is Laban described as Rebeccah's brother, something we have known for a long time? Why is Rebeccah described here once more as both Jacob's and Esau's mother?

Actually, the Torah found it necessary to explain why Isaac would send a pious son to a person such as Laban, seeing the latter was known to be wicked. True, Abraham had despatched Eliezer to take a wife for Isaac from the house of Bethuel; however, Bethuel was not a well known רשע, an evil person such as Laban. Besides, Abraham had never told Eliezer in so many words to go to the house of Bethuel whereas he had named Laban specifically as Jacob's destination. He instructed him to marry a daughter of the wicked Laban. By repeating that Laban was after all a brother of the pious Rebeccah the Torah alerts us to the probability that one or both of Laban's daughters could be just as pious as Rebeccah who stemmed from the house of Bethuel. One must not assume that the children and grandchildren of a wicked father or grandfather will automatically turn out to be of evil character. The Torah hints at this by reminding us that even Rebeccah was the mother of both a pious person such as Jacob and an evil person such as Esau.

You have to appreciate that in the period under discussion [prior to the revelation at Mount Sinai in which all the holy souls participated Ed.] the holy souls had not yet been separated from the regions in which they were imprisoned. Seeing that Abraham's family was recognised as a region where holiness had found a foothold, both he and Sarah being the first proselytes, anyone who would subsequently convert to Judaism would be called either Abraham if a male or Sarah if a female. It is a fact that holy members of a holy species look for other members of the same species. Abraham was still incomplete in this regard as neither he nor his son Isaac had as yet produced female offspring, i.e. holy female souls. Perhaps this is even the reason that we are told in Genesis 25,19: "Abraham begat Isaac," to remind us that he had succeeded only in producing a holy male soul. This situation still existed when Isaac sent out Jacob to secure a wife. The holy female souls had not yet been separated from their place of imprisonment. Isaac therefore had to send Jacob to search for his lost mate, i.e. the girl in whose body such a holy soul was imprisoned.

It was only during subsequent generations that Jews were no longer forced to roam the world to find their mates amongst the Gentiles. If nonetheless some "sparks" of holiness (holy souls in captivity) still exist amongst the Gentiles they will eventually convert and then be recognised as holy souls returning to their home (the Jewish people).

This raises the question of Abraham's insistence that Isaac not marry someone of Canaanite descent. Isaac also instructed Jacob not to marry a Canaanite. Bereshit Rabbah explains this prohibition to marry girls of Canaanite descent as being due to that tribe being cursed whereas Abraham's seed was blessed. Actually the words of the Midrash are somewhat obscure. In light of what we have written Abraham may have meant that Canaan [Noach's grandson] had been denied holy female souls amongst his seed as a result of Noach's curse. Hence there was no chance of finding the girl who possessed a holy soul amongst that tribe. This is the deeper meaning of Noach's curse, i.e. that Canaan would be denied access to holiness.

Whereas it is a fact that even nowadays we still experience conversions to Judaism amongst the Gentiles, it is remarkable that we have no record of members of the Canaanites ever converting to Judaism as did some Romans and other nationals, for instance. This proves our theory. This may also have been the real reason that the Torah commanded the Jewish people not to allow a single Canaanite soul to survive [in the campaign to capture the land of Israel] as we know from Deuteronomy 20,16. The Torah may have stressed the word "soul" in that verse to indicate that none of these people had a holy soul worth preserving. This was the difference between the Canaanites and nations such as Ammon and Moab.

Since G'd has revealed all this to us we must try and understand what purpose our subjugation by Canaanite tribes served (compare Judges 4,2), seeing that the purpose of exile is to extract the sparks of holiness that are scattered amongst the Gentiles, and there are no such "sparks" amongst the Canaanites. Our sages have told us in Pessachim 119 that "our forefathers did not depart from Egypt until they had turned Egypt into a trap that did not contain any bait and into a deep pool of water devoid of fish." The scriptural proof cited is Exodus 12,36: "they emptied Egypt." The Ari zal in his שער הגלגולים explains that it was necessary to empty Egypt of any such stray holy souls to make a return by the Jewish people in the future pointless. In view of all this, what purpose could subjugation of the Jewish people by the Canaanites have served if there was not even a chance to save some stray holy soul through all our suffering?

We find in לקוטי תורה פרשת מקץ that there are two different "sparks" of holy souls which are imprisoned in the קליפה. One is the type of soul which is freed through being "born," i.e. through entering a human body at birth. Examples of such souls are: Abraham, Sarah, Rebeccah, Rachel, as well as the soul of Rabbi Chaninah ben Tradyon which emanated from Shechem's having slept with Jacob's daughter Dinah. Ruth the Moabite and Naamon the Ammonite are also examples of such souls. The other type of holy soul imprisoned in the קליפה is one that is firmly attached to its קליפה and is not capable of exiting

from its source unless its קליפה causes anguish to Israel. When that happens the holy soul trapped within the קליפה is released and able to return to its origin. Now we understand why there is a purpose to Israel being subjected to exile at the hands of such people [representatives of such קליפות Ed.]. The prophet Ovadiah said concerning such an exile: "This sickening exile for the children of Israel under the Canaanites as far as Tzorfat (Ovadiah 1,20)." This verse which uses the term החל must then be understood similarly to Daniel 8,27: נהייתי ונחליתי, "I was broken up and I was sick." Such an exile achieves its objective in a manner different from all other exiles of the Jewish people. When Ovadiah speaks of כנענים instead of בכנענים when describing that exile, as well as describing Canaan in the plural instead of in the singular as is the case with other nations where Israel was exiled, this may be a veiled reference to the "sparks" of holiness still hidden within the קליפה of Canaan which are known as כנענים. In short, Ovadiah describes the purpose of that exile as being the chance of "rescuing" holy souls that were still identified with כנענים prior to the ultimate redemption, thus enabling those souls to participate in that redemption.

28:6 *When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him off to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, charging him, as he blessed him, "You shall not take a wife from among the Canaanite women,"*

OR HACHAIM

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, etc. This verse does not seem to tell us anything new. If it were meant to tell us that this was the reason Esau took an additional non-Canaanite wife, verse eight would have sufficed for that purpose.

We must therefore look for some meaning beyond the mere words of the verse. Esau was aware of Jacob's' departure and of its nature, i.e. that he thereby fulfilled both a commandment by his father and mother and the commandment to look for a wife. Knowing that Isaac had blessed Jacob to complete his undertaking successfully, Esau did not bother to pursue Jacob, realising that under such circumstances he would not succeed. Although Esau is reputed to have sent his eldest son Eliphaz to catch up with Jacob and to kill him (according to Rashi on Genesis 29,11), it is possible that he merely wanted to test his ability to vanquish Jacob on his journey. This scenario may have been re-enacted when the descendants of Esau (Amalek) attacked the Israelites after the latter had crossed the sea of reeds. Esau considered his son's ability to pursue Jacob successfully as greater than his own ability to do so.

מפטיר MAFTIR

28:8 *Esau realized that the Canaanite women displeased his father Isaac.*

OR HACHAIM

Esau realised that the Canaanite daughters were displeasing in the eyes of his father. The Torah tells us here that Esau's only concern was the effect his Canaanite wives had on his father's sensibilities. The fact that these women were evil by nature did not bother him. His soul did not despise them. Subsequent events teach that the fact that Isaac disapproved of these women did not produce any results other than that Esau did not marry still more Canaanite girls. He did not consider divorcing these wives. Perhaps Esau's only concern was that his father's blessing would not be applicable to children born to him by his Canaanite wives, and that is why married a daughter of Ishmael to insure that his father's blessing would remain effective for his descendants.