

# kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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Kol Chovevei Torah is a publication of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School. YCT's mission is to professionally train open Orthodox rabbis who will lead the Jewish community and shape its spiritual and intellectual character in consonance with modern and open Orthodox values and commitments.

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Where Open Orthodoxy Begins

## Yaakov and Yisrael: The Integration of Body and Soul *By Rabbi Avi Weiss*

This week's portion tells of Yitzchak's special love for Esav and Rivka's special love for Yaakov. (Genesis 25:28) One wonders how Yitzchak could have been so naive to prefer his eldest son Esav more than the younger Yaakov. After all, Esav was merely a hunter while Yaakov was a student of Torah.

Perhaps it can be suggested that Yitzchak knew that Esav was physically strong. Having just experienced the Akedah (the binding of Isaac), that moment when a knife was literally on his neck, Yitzchak favored this trait. He sensed that throughout Jewish history we would be similarly bound with a knife on our neck-facing near death. Physical strength would be needed.

What the Jewish people needed, Yitzchak thought, was a two headed leadership. Esav would be the physical heir. He would defend the Jewish people against all attacks. Yaakov on the other hand, would be the spiritual heir who would teach Torah and soulful principles to his people. Yitzchak was not fooled by Yaakov's disguise and therefore blessed Yaakov, with blessings that were physical in nature. "May God give you your due of heaven and plenty of corn and wine." (Genesis 27:28) The blessings Yitzchak gives to Yaakov just before Yaakov leaves home were the covenantal blessings. "May the Lord give you the blessings of Avraham and may you inherit the land of your sojournings ." (Genesis 28:4)

Rivka did not see things that way. She insisted that there could only be one heir. The body and the soul should not be separated. Rivka understood that we are not human beings who are disjointed. The body and soul must work in harmony. The soul needs the

body to exist in this world and the body needs the soul to give meaning and direction to its existence. For Rivka, the pathway to spirituality is not to separate it from the body, to denigrate the body but rather to sanctify it. She therefore insisted that Jacob, the Jew of the spirit, the student of Torah, could learn to be physically strong as well.

Thus, as my Rebbe the saintly Rav Ahron Soloveitchik of blessed memory points out, Rivka pushes Yaakov to have courage by insisting that he challenge Esav by taking the blessing from him and putting his life on the line. We know that Yaakov eventually learns this lesson for later in his life he successfully wrestles with a mysterious man, (Genesis 32:25) and is given an additional name- Yisrael which means one who is able to fight and be strong.

The body-soul issue is one that has been debated and discussed for many centuries and in many religions and cultures. It is certainly present in the modern State of Israel. Many Yeshivot refuse to allow their students to fight in the army. They insist that they are protecting Israel spiritually through their learning and physical protection should be taken care of by others.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, however, thought differently. He was the father of Yeshivot Hesder whose students enlist in the army and fight; gun in one hand, and Talmud in the other. In tune with Rivka's thinking, they become almost like two children of the third patriarch, Yaakov, the student of Torah, and Yisrael, the strong fighter, for they integrate both body and soul in the service of God.

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