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ORTHODOX UNION
Enhancing Jewish Life

Beneath the Surface

"And Isaac loved Esav because [his] game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob (Bereishis 25:28)."

Families are complex, and the families of our Matriarchs and Patriarchs were no exception. Children don't always follow in the footsteps of their parents and often make different choices, cultivating a distinct life path. Nonetheless, the job of a parent is to love and appreciate their child for who the child is and not for whom the parents want them to be. But this is far easier said than done. How does one genuinely love a child when the child makes choices that bring the parent pain?

And so, the Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esav. We must assume that Yitzchak and Rivka each loved both of their children, yet each had a unique relationship with a particular child. Rivka's connection with Yaakov is understandable. Yaakov was holy and genuine, he was the clear heir to the Abrahamitic legacy. He was a source of wonderful and ongoing *nachas*. But what was the nature of the connection between Yitzchak and Esav? It would appear they were worlds apart, yet Yitzchak has incredible love for his first-born son. What was "loveable" about Esav?

Of all our Patriarchs we know the least about Yitzchak. While we are told of the *Akeyda* (*binding of Yitzchak*) and Yitzchak's willingness to offer himself upon the altar of God, this event is really looked at through the lens of Avraham's selfless dedication to God. All we know about Yitzchak is that he dug wells. Though we are taught so little about Yitzchak's life, the Torah goes into great detail about his well-digging activities. Why?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe provides an incredible insight. To benefit from the beautiful and sustaining, subterranean waters you must be willing to dig. You must take out your shovel, bend your back and take away shovelful of dirt after shovelful of dirt until you find the refreshing waters. This is a metaphor for the self. We each possess a beautiful wellspring of holiness and spiritual beauty. However, often this holiness is obscured by layers of "dirt." There is dirt from the bad decisions we make, there is dirt from negative life-experiences, there is the dirt of failure and set-backs. All this dirt sits on top of my well and covers my inner waters. We must find the courage to dig, to haul away the earth though changing and adjusting certain behaviors and habits. This was the great strength of Isaac; he was a digger. He was able to dig through the layers of dirt and find the beautiful waters of holiness in himself and in others. When the world looked at Esav they saw one thing – dirt.

Yitzchak saw the dirt which covered his son, but he also saw the beautiful waters of holiness which were surging beneath the layer upon layer of thick dirt and grime. He loved his son, because he was able to see the waters and not just the dirt.

We must all become well-diggers and utilize this skill in all our relationships. We need to love our children for who they are and not for who we want them to be. Even if our children get covered in dirt, we must appreciate that the waters still run deep and are ever-present. We must strive to see the good in others and recognize that even when people hurt us, there is still good within that individual. We must try to focus on the water and not the dirt. We must look for the water within ourselves. We cannot define ourselves by the dirt of our indiscretions or misdeeds. We must remember that no matter how much dirt we have piled on ourselves, the inner waters never dry up, they are always present, waiting to be discovered. ■

Rabbi Shmuel Silber has served the Orthodox Union (OU) as its Executive Vice President since November 2026. As the executive vice president, Rabbi Silber is responsible for representing the OU's vision on both Torah and public policy, and providing hashkafic and halachic guidance within the organization and beyond. Prior to joining the OU, Rabbi Silber served for 23 years as the rabbi of Suburban Orthodox Congregation Toras Chaim, building it into one of Baltimore's most vibrant and dynamic kehillahs. Rabbi Silber is also the founder and dean of the Institute for Jewish Continuity (IJC), which provides contemporary Torah learning with Chassidic influences for adults at all levels. As the Founding Rabbi of the Berger Towers community in Katamonim, Jerusalem, Rabbi Silber oversees the community's rabbinic leadership and hashkafic direction. Rabbi Silber received semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University and holds a master's degree in secondary Jewish education from the Azrieli Graduate School.

