

***In this week's Torah portion we read a nail-biting saga. The Torah tells us that Yaakov, the younger brother, after having legally purchased the primogeniture rights from Esav, his older brother, dons his brothers' clothing and successfully masquerades as him to receive his father's blessing. As Yaakov appears before Yitzchak, the verse tells us that, "And he came near, and kissed him. And he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which G-D has blessed." The word B'gadav, his clothing is similar to another word, Bogdav, his guilty ones. In fact the Midrash, in typical Midrashic fashions explains that when Yitzchak smelled Yaakov's clothing, he actually smelled guilt, the rebellious sinners of Yaakov's descendants.***

***This Midrash is quite puzzling, although the Hebrew word for sinners and clothing are closely related, what is the message of this Midrash? Why did he smell the guilty ones? If he did smell them, why did he proceed to give the Yaakov the blessing? If he foresaw guilt in Yaakov's descendants wouldn't he have been reluctant to bestow the blessing on Yaakov? It is unfathomable that Yitzchak would bless a son from whom he anticipated guilty descendants.***

***There is another fascinating aspect to this story. The verse says that he smelled the scent of the field; however, there are a lot of different smells that can emanate from the field. Which one in particular did he smell? Rashi explains that he smelled the fragrance of apples. I am certainly no expert in apples, but I don't think that I have ever even noticed a specific apple scent, how did Yitzchak recognize this smell? And why did he smell like this particular fruit? What is so special about apples?***

***The Gerrer Rebbe (Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter) explains that every nation or religion has many great leaders and influential, moral people. The presence of such people does not indicate anything noteworthy or special about that particular people. The true test of a nation's greatness is how the common or even the criminal element of that society acts. The first Lubavitcher Rebbe (R. Schneur Zalman of Liady) in his magnum opus, Tanya, famously writes that even the sinners of Israel are almost always ready to die for the sake of G-D. Amongst our great nation, the faith of the common folk is so strong that they would rather die than deny their faith.***

***Where does this incredible inner strength come from? Where have even the Bogdav, the rebellious of the Jewish people achieved such a powerful and unbreakable connection to G-D?***

***Many years ago when the Jews stood at Mt. Sinai and agreed to accept the Torah, they uttered the most profound and unequivocal words of acceptance. They said "Naaseh, Vnishma- we will do and we will hear". These words of complete submissiveness and utter willingness to acquiesce to G-D's wishes have come to define our faith and trust in G-D. The Talmud, in tractate Shabbat when discussing these words and the accompanying commitment, compares it to an apple tree. Just an apple tree bears its fruit before its leaves, so too did we agree to abide by G-D's laws before we even heard His laws. The counter intuitiveness of our commitment is as strange as the growth of the apple tree. Just as one should naturally wish to hear what their commitment would entail before agreeing to it, similarly the leaves which protect and shelter the fruit should precede the growth of the fruit. However, our faith in G-D is not subject to consideration, contemplation, or rationalization. We like the apple tree, produce its fruit first; we have and always will put our complete faith in G-D, regardless of the consequences and sometimes undesired outcomes.***

***When Yitzchak smelled the apple fragrance even amongst the most uncommitted, unaffiliated and distant Jews, he recognized the greatness of Yaakov's children. He recognized a people whose faith and commitment is unconditional and unfettered, not dependent on understanding or great knowledge. He divined a nation that would live on forever, never capitulating to troubles or tragedies. How could he possibly refuse to give his blessing to that?***

**Shabbat Shalom  
Rabbi Meir Tannenbaum**