

# *Shiur L'Yom Chamishi*<sup>1</sup>

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS:     ***Torah Toldot:***                     **Genesis 27:1-29**  
                  ***Haftarah:***                                 **Malachi 1:13-14**  
                  ***B'rit Chadasha:***                     **Romans 9:10-13**

*“What if my father touches me?”*  
[Genesis 27:12(a)]

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Today's Meditation is Psalm 107:21-30;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #3, *S'lach* [The Prayer for Forgiveness]

I have described parsha *Toldot*, our *parsha ha-shavua*, alternately as the *parsha of Violently Clashing Worldviews* and as the *parsha of Training Up A New Generation of Partners in the Covenant*. The entire parsha consists of critical lessons of choice and lifestyle for those who aspire to walk with God the way our father Avraham did. In the aliyah of Torah we will study today the changing partners' theme – and indeed the concept of thinking *cross-generationally* – definitely takes center stage.

The question on everyone's mind suddenly seems to be ‘*when Yitzchak is gone, what of his inheritance will pass to whom?*’

## ***The Two Candidates – And Their Very Different Worldviews***

The two obvious choices to carry on the pact between the Holy One and Avraham – his twin grandsons - are as different as *darkness and light*, as separate as the *waters above and the waters below*, and as distinct of personality and purpose as the *dry land and the gathered seas*. The two, though twins by birth, are *oil and water, salt and snail*. The sages refer to them as ***aish v'kash*** - ‘*fire and straw*’.

### ***1. In This Corner: Esav***

In one corner is *Esav*. He is ruddy, ruggedly good-looking, hairy, impulsive, and strong as a bull. He is a man of the field, skilled as a hunter and a warrior. A self-made ‘man's man’, he uses his ample muscle and well-honed physical skills to excel in whatever he does.

Will Yitzchak's inheritance – in Heaven and/or on Earth - pass to *Esav*? He is the one whose appetite for ‘that red, red stuff’ has enslaved him. **Genesis 25:30**. He is

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the one who *'ate, and drank, and went his way'* and thus *'despised his birthright'*? **Genesis 25:34.**

Esav is voracious in appetite and unrelenting in pursuit of whatever fleshly thing his natural urges call his attention toward. To him women are among the 'things' of life – objects for his lust and targets of his desire for conquest. A lusty sensualist, he frolics with two of the daughters of the sons of Chet simultaneously, oblivious to the consternation and potential social conflicts this causes for Yitzchak and Rivkah. **Genesis 26:34-35.** It is Yitzchak and Rivkah, of course, who have to deal with the wrath of the sons of Chet when Esav hurts one of their daughters' feelings and the drama breaks out – as it inevitably does.

Esav sees *human beings –including his own family members, and time, and his father's God* for that matter - primarily as obstacles standing between him and whatever he thinks he wants. For Esav life is all about the hunt, all about the chase, all about the conquest. So as soon as he gets something he thinks he wants, it immediately begins to lose the capacity to excite him. And since he lives for excitement, he eventually throws whatever he has acquired, conquered, won, or taken from someone else aside or away and goes out in search of something else – something bigger, something more challenging, something more *exciting*. Esav is thus a bondservant to the *thrill of the chase, the sensuousness of the quest, and the passion of the drama.*

Esav is at essence a 'taker'. Even when he gives something to someone else, he does so with a motive to get something back. Do you know anyone like that, Dear Reader? Alas, such people are among men most miserable – and generally make everyone around them most miserable as well. Such men, you see, can never feel the blessed joy of gratitude – for they are never at peace, never satisfied. Nor can such men ever be content with the Holy One's Will for their lives. They can never trust the Holy One for anything important, because they want what they want when they want it, how they want it, and become enraged quickly when everything does not go according to the way they imagine it should be.

Alas, men like Esav, though occasionally appearing very sentimental on a surface level, can never truly love or be loyal to either the Creator or to any other human being. Such people can have pets, but not relationships. Such people process everyone and everything that comes within their sphere of influence through the lens of gratification. Nothing and no one can stand up against their insatiable urges and appetites for any significant period of time.

The Holy One – like Yitzchak - loves Esav, and never gives up on him. But of course Esav seldom stops pursuing his lusts and appetites long enough to respond

in any meaningful way to the Father's Silent Pursuit and Watchful Care. For Esav, you see, the father - and the Holy One – are useful only for one thing - what Esav can *get from them*. Esav sees men, women, children, situations, relationships, and the Holy One *only through the eyes, lusts, and sentiments of the flesh*.

Of course, there is *a little of Esav in all of us*. And, of course, it is this part of us that the world around us knows exactly how to exploit and manipulate to its advantage. The Esav in us therefore always winds up enslaved – if not by outrage, offense and drama, by over-indulgence, addictive behaviors, emotion-based ideologies, cheap notions of sentimentalism, and guilt and performance based elements of religion.

## ***2. And in This Corner: Ya'akov***

In the other corner is *Ya'akov*. He is fair-complexioned, handsome, smooth-skinned, meditative, smart as a whip, and the ultimate quick study. Ya'akov is a man of commerce, trade and business, who uses wit, wiles and words with excellence. Unfortunately, Ya'akov's primary claim to fame at this point in the narrative is that he knows how to cook up an appetizing stew and negotiate a cunning deal. At 40 years old this one still has no wife – or even a prospect of one. Indeed from all appearances this one seems to be on the road toward a 'failure to launch' lifestyle hanging around his mother's tent. At least, unlike his lusty brother, Ya'akov has thus far been able to keep his hormones in check when face to face with the exotic young beauties of Kena'an.

Will Yitzchak's inheritance bypass his firstborn and flow instead to his younger son - the one who was born holding onto Esav's heel? Ya'akov has been his mother's favorite, but not so his father's. As a result Ya'akov has developed a deep longing to somehow earn his father's attention and affection. That has made him a bit of a *traditionalist* – always trying to connect with his father through *devoting himself to learning* and *following* family traditions. Thus far, it is really more about winning his father's affection away from Esav than it is about truly honoring his father's mission. He has the traditions of Avraham and Yitzchak down pat – but alas he does not yet have the passion for and intimate relationship with the Creator that make the traditions meaningful on anything more than a sentimental basis.

The smaller and weaker of the twins, Ya'akov has had to learn the hard way to out-think and out-manuever his larger, stronger, more physical antagonist. He knows the pain Esav is capable of inflicting better than anyone in the world. He now knows exactly what triggers Esav's rage, what stirs his shallow sentimentality, and what calms his savage beast. Struggle by struggle, encounter by encounter, wound

by wound, dramatic episode by dramatic episode, Ya'akov has been learning strategies and techniques for dealing with Esav and those of his ilk. As a result Ya'akov is no longer intimidated – much less overwhelmed - by Esav's vastly superior size, physical strength, and bluster.

Ya'akov has learned how to play a very satisfactory *Rocky Balboa* to Esav's best *Ivan Drago*. Perhaps, with a lot of training, Ya'akov may even prove capable of playing a functional *Esther* to Esav's best *Haman* and a passable *Yehudah Maccabee* to Esav's best *Antiochus Epiphanes*. Ya'akov has learned – as have his descendants in every generation since - that no matter how big and loud and demanding Esav may be, he will never be anything more than a pawn in the Mighty Hand of the Holy One. Esav can jostle and scorn and wound and even maim Ya'akov - but he can never overcome him. Unless, of course, Ya'akov voluntarily surrenders.

How about you, Beloved - are *you* learning how to handle the Esavs the Holy One has allowed in your life?

### ***But Is It Really Time to Push the Envelope On the Inheritance Issue?***

After four full decades of life neither of the young men in Yitzchak and Rivkah's household have shown a whole lot in the way of merit thus far. Though raised in a home of Covenant-keepers and being the beneficiaries of the amazing blessings from the Holy One, neither of them has ever even had a God-encounter, much less embarked on a Divine Adventure the way Avraham and Yitzchak regularly did.

Neither of the young men has thus far been described by Torah as righteous. Neither of them has been described thus far as 'walking with the Holy One'. Neither of them has been described thus far as keeping *the way of the Holy One* or *doing righteousness and justice*.

We have not seen either of them *meditating* [Hebrew *suwach*-ing] or *interceding* [Hebrew *atar*-ing] like their father did, or *inquiring* [Hebrew *darash*-ing] *of the Holy One* like their mother did. Indeed, the plain truth of the matter is that in the narrative of Torah we have not seen either of these 40-year old young men doing anything whatever that leads to believe they have a spiritual life of any kind. Will one of these two really receive the inheritance of the most blessed man and woman on the face of the planet?

### ***But of What Exactly Does Yitzchak's Inheritance Consist Anyway?***

Oh there are material things galore. There is silver and gold and precious garments and metals from Egypt and Gerar. There are herdsmen, menservants and

maidservants. There are great flocks and herds that their grandfather started and their father and mother increased. There are invaluable watering rights to wells their grandfather dug and their father reopened. There are extensive rights of pasturage that their grandfather and father negotiated with the Hittites and the Ph'lishtim. There is the field and cave near Hebron that Avraham purchased from the sons of Chet for 400 shekels of silver and in which the bodily remains of Avraham and Sarah lie interred.

If we have learned anything thus far in our study of Torah however we surely have learned that material things like those described above are nowhere near the most important things in life. The inheritance of Yitzchak, son of Avraham and Sarah, heir to the Covenant Promises of the Creator of Heaven and Earth, is surely more than material possessions. The Holy One had promised Avraham that He would bring forth out of Avraham's loins a **great nation**, and that in his seed **all nations of the earth would be blessed**. **Genesis 12:2-3**. The Creator of the Universe had promised Avraham that his seed would be as beyond numbering as the grains of dust on the earth [**Genesis 13:16**] and the stars in the Heavens [**Genesis 15:5**]. The Holy One had promised that Avraham's and Yitzchak's seed would be given not just rights of grazing and watering and burial but full eternal rights of possession and inheritance over all the land the world had theretofore known as the land of Kena'an. See **Genesis 13:15, 15:6 & 18-21, etc.**

Will one of these two lads really be the chosen vessel of the Holy One to carry those promises forward toward fruition? And if so, does Yitzchak really have any say in which of the two sons that is? And wait a minute – is Yitzchak going somewhere? We who know Torah know that he is only about 80 years old, and is going to live several more years, and not die until he is 'old and full of years'. **Genesis 35:29**. So why all of a sudden is Torah focusing everyone's attention so intently upon what will happen when Yitzchak is gone? Is something about to happen that will dramatically affect the inheritance that Yitzchak will pass on to the next generation? You bet it is, Dear Reader.

## ***It's a Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall!***

Yitzchak's life up to this point has been a mixed bag of sorts. He was born as a child of promise, a supernatural gift into a household of great means. He was raised in a Godly heritage. He has for a wife a true *ishet Chayil* [a woman of strength and virtue], whom he loves and from whom he draws great comfort. By the blessing of the Holy One he has greatly prospered, even beyond his father, even while the people around him were experiencing horrific draught and famine. He has two strong, healthy sons. But he has also seen and been the target of much trouble. He was hated and mocked in his formative years as a child by his older half-brother Yish'mael. He felt the cold flint knife pressed against his neck and stared death in the face at Mount Moriyah. He lost his mother unexpectedly in his 40<sup>th</sup> year.

Yitzchak suffered with his beloved bride through 20 years of barrenness. He experienced famine and had to migrate from his ancestral home just to survive. He became the first of our patriarchs to experience the cruel anti-Semitism that would be unleashed upon the descendants of his son Ya'akov generation after generation, century after century, millennium after millennium, until Messiah comes in His glory.

But Yitzchak has not only *survived all these things* through the covenant faithfulness of the Holy One his God, he has greatly prospered through them. And he has *managed to stay above bitterness and hatred*. He has truly *re-opened the wells of living water that his father Avraham dug* - in the *spiritual realm* as well as the *physical*. And so as the curtain rises on today's aliyah, if you are like me, you feel a poignant sense of sadness when you read that Yitzchak - Avraham and Sarah's miracle child - the child of promise in whom all the fullness of the blessing of the Holy One for mankind resides, is now in many ways only a shadow of the man at whose sight Rivkah fell off of her camel.

Can you believe it? By the time of today's aliyah Yitzchak - the ancestor we are seemingly just getting to know - is already nearing the end of his brief but passionate dance across the stage of Torah. Or so it appears. He will actually live many more years. But Rivkah, Ya'akov, and Esav do not know that. All they see is that Yitzchak is beginning to suffer the ravages of advanced age. In his case, with the blessing of long life came the experience of losing strength and vitality, reduced functionality . . . and perhaps worst of all *an advanced form of blindness*. As Torah puts it:

***Vayehi ki-zaken Yitzchak***

*And it came to pass that Yitzchak grew old*

***Vatich'heynah eynav mer'ot***

*and his eyes became so dim that he could not see . . .*  
[Genesis 27:1(a)]

As we discussed earlier in the week the essence of the week's studies is summed up in the phrase 'the *toldot* of Yitzchak'. As we have seen, the phrase '*the toldot of Yitzchak*' refers to much more than to genealogy.

The phrase '*the toldot of Yitzchak*' references *the sum total of who Yitzchak was*. It incorporates *every purpose under Heaven for which Yitzchak was given the breath of life*. It points to *all the trials and tribulations, all the God-encounters, and all the Divinely ordained life experiences through which Yitzchak as the chosen seed of Avraham, was pushed* by the sheer force of the covenant the Holy One made with his father.

For as we discussed in the introductory *shiur* to this parsha, the sages say that whenever a person's life is full of inner meaning, even the accounts and chronicles of that person's life and the long-lasting effects of his or her interactions - with the Holy One, with fellow men, and with Creation - are so powerful that they can serve as sources of *inspiration* and *revelation* for all who live thereafter.

It appears from the opening lines of today's aliyah that for reasons known only to the Holy One, one of the Divinely ordained life experiences Yitzchak is destined to live through is premature *physical disability*. As it was with Yitzchak so it is likely to be for many of us. Let us take comfort – or at least instruction – from the fact that at least one of the patriarchs walked the road of old-age disability ahead of us, and left us a legacy of how to deal with it.

### ***Dealing With It!***

How are we supposed to cope with the ravages of time on our physical bodies? How are we supposed to honor the Holy One – or fulfill our Divine destiny and purpose and life - when strength ebbs from our eyes, our ears, our limbs, our hearts, and even our minds? Let's see what we can glean from Yitzchak's story, shall we?

The first thing we can glean from Yitzchak's story is that *he kept looking for ways to find joy in life*. He was blind, hence he could not hunt as he apparently once did. But he did not let that stop him. Torah tells us he called Esav, and said to him:

***V'atah sa-na chelecha telyecha v'kashtecha***

*Now take your equipment, your dangle and bow,*

***vetze ha-sadeh v'tzudah li tza'id***

*and go out in the field to trap me some game.*

*Va'aseh-li mat'amim ka'asher ahavti*

*Make it into a tasty dish, such as I love*

*V'havi'ah li v'ochelah ba'avur*

*and bring it to me to eat.*

*tevarechecha nafshi beterem amut*

*My soul will then bless you before I die.'*

[Genesis 27:3-4]

Did you catch that last phrase: ‘My soul will then bless you . . . **BEFORE I DIE?**’ So . . . it is actually *Yitzchak* who is pushing the envelope on the inheritance issue. Rivkah, Esav, and Ya’akov are not the *initiators* of the narrative that follows – they are merely going to be reacting to a process *Yitzchak* has started in motion with the words of his mouth.

Words are powerful things, aren’t they? Words can start a chain reaction that either *heals* a family or *devastates* it. I will leave it to your imagination to decide which it will be in this case. And I will leave it to you and the Holy One to decide which effect the words of your mouth will have on your family and other spheres of influence.

### ***Of Fathers and Sons***

Long ago *Yitzchak* had made a choice to love his unlovable son *Esav* with an unrelenting love. *Esav* was a handful alright - but he was *his* handful. He had prayed for his beloved *Rivkah* to have a child through 20 long years of barrenness, and *Esav* was the firstfruit of his prayers. Would he pray the prayer and then reject the answer to it? No. He had been given two sons. And he knew full well that the one who needed him most was the most troublesome one – the one his mother simply could not handle. And so despite all the trouble *Esav* brought into the household over the years, *Yitzchak* kept loving him the way only a father can love a prodigal. He made the choice to absorb the blows of *Esav*’s impetuosity. He trusted the Holy One to turn *Esav*’s prodigal soul into ‘*prey in his mouth*’. And now, as he sensed his own health beginning to fail, *Yitzchak* decided to make a great ploy - and cast a final snare aimed at awakening and redeeming his rough-and-tumble son’s dark soul.

*Yitzchak* knew, you see, that underneath *Esav*’s crude and boisterous exterior there beat the heart of a tenderhearted little boy that craved the affirmation of his father.

*Yitzchak* was a devoted husband of one wife who modeled for his household meditation and passionate prayer; *Esav* was not like him at all in these important

particulars. Esav was a man of violent passions who liked to carouse with multiple Kena'ani women at night and occupy his days with trapping and killing things and boasting about it. The two men did not share much in likes and dislikes, but they had one area of very clear agreement. And it was on that area of agreement that Yitzchak chose to focus. Yitzchak called Esav to his tent and commissioned him to go hunting and to bring him a meal of *'flavorful meat, such as I love'*. This was one area of commonality between the father and his son.

Perhaps Torah is trying to teach us that one of the keys to aging with dignity is never to let age and diminishing skills or resources make us quit seeking the pleasure of the company of either *the people we love most* or *the blessings of life that have had always had the capacity to bring us joy*.

Secondly, Yitzchak's story teaches us that whatever limitations age may place upon us, as long as we can *think* and *speak*, we can still be a fountain of blessing to others – including those upon whom we are dependent. Yitzchak not only wants to enjoy savory dishes of venison – he wants to be strengthened by same so he can *bless* Esav with a life-changing blessing. Yitzchak knows that the blessing he has to offer Esav is worth more a hundred times the effort, energy, and time Esav will spend in the endeavor.

In other words, a key to aging with dignity is to focus not on what we cannot do, or what limitations our physical condition foists upon us, but upon what we can give to others. Perhaps all we can give is a kind word, or a friendly smile, a different perspective, a piece of sage advice, or a gentle rebuke. But as long as we have breath, not only can we bless the Holy One - we can also bless the people around us.

As the narrative continues look for other ways Yitzchak's words and actions teach us how to grow old gracefully<sup>2</sup>. There is no question that Yitzchak was, at the time of the events about which we are reading, far beyond his 'prime', and by no means 'on top of his game' – physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. And yet, please note that he is going to be the only one of the characters in the drama that is about to unfold that is going to come out of this episode with his dignity intact.

Perhaps there's more substance to this quiet old man than we have ever taken the time to see before. So do not feel sorry for Yitzchak because he's old and blind –

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, keep in mind also the admonition of Kohelet [the 'Preacher'] in the final chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes: "*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" \* \* \* Fear the Holy One and treasure and keep watch over His commandments, for this is the whole mission of man. For the Holy One will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*"

learn from him! But for now let us consider the other main characters in the compelling drama of which Yitzchak is about to become the star.

### ***Which of the Twins Will Receive What Blessing?***

As Yitzchak ponders his life, and the material blessings released upon his life by the Holy One - he decides it is time to bring up the touchy subject of how he will bequeath that with which he has been blessed by the Holy One to one of his sons. *Someone is going to receive Yitzchak's Blessing!* But who will it be?

What we would *like* to have recorded in the text of Torah at this critical juncture would be another "God encounter" for Yitzchak. We could write it ourselves, couldn't we? It would go something like the following:

[Note: The following is a *literary device* only; it represents not what did happen, but what we, in our presumptuousness, might wish had happened]

*. . . And Yitzchak atar-ed the Holy One.  
He bared his soul before the God of his father,  
emptying himself of his own will and desires,  
and earnestly seeking direction from the Holy One  
as to which of his sons should receive what portions of his blessing.*

*And the Holy One appeared to Yitzchak, and spoke to him saying:  
'I am the God of your father Avraham,  
and I am the source of all blessings you have received,  
and of everything that you contemplate passing on to your sons.  
Your firstborn, Esav, has despised his birthright,  
considering it less valuable than a bowl of bean stew.*

*He is cavorting with two women of the Kena'anim  
who have polluted his mind and heart with idolatry,  
which has caused much pain to your beloved wife Rivkah and yourself.  
That situation is never going to get any better, because Esav does not want it to.*

*Therefore, while you may bless Esav with an eldest son's portion  
of the physical wealth I have given you,  
it is Ya'akov to whom you should impart the blessing  
of the things I promised to your father Avraham.*

*I am the Holy One,  
who miraculously caused you to be born to your father in his old age,  
and who has preserved you for this moment.  
Sh'ma, Yitzchak - and impart blessings to your sons  
in accordance with My Words."*

Ah, but alas, the Creator's ways are not our ways. No "God encounter" such as we just fantasized about ever occurred. For reasons we cannot entirely know - because we are not told - the Holy One remained totally "silent" on the matter.

And so, when Yitzchak decided it was time to “pass the torch” to one of his sons, the events which transpired set off shockwaves which still resound - as war continues between the world empires of Esav against the descendants of Ya’akov who bear the blessing of Yitzchak and have rights of possession of the land of Israel. We might as well get right to it.

### ***Dressing Up In Esav’s Clothing***

Deception. Illusion. Spin-doctoring. Double-speaking. Play-acting. Lying to get what we want. Twisting the truth. These are things we would *like* to believe are far from us. These are things we *like* to associate with others, and judge *them* guilty of. But in the drama that Torah unveils for us today, our own beloved matriarch, Rivkah - the same woman who just three chapters of Torah ago became the prototype for the “woman of virtue”, and the perfect Bride - in today’s aliyah hatches the most devious deception described in Scripture.

Yes, Dear Reader, it is *the mind of a revered saint of the Holy One* which conjures up a plan to “pull the wool over the eyes” of an old blind man - none other than her husband, Yitzchak. And after a few protestations (mostly centering on ‘*what if I get caught . . .*’), our ancestor Ya’akov of blessed memory jumps into the diabolical plan his mother has hatched with both feet, and tells lie after lie – to get what he wants from his disabled father. Read along with me the depth of the deception. In the following quotation the questions/inquiries of Yitzchak, who was clearly suspicious, are written in italics; and the blatant fabrications of Ya’akov in response to Yitzchak’s questions/inquiries are written in bold print:

*"How is it that you have found it [prey] so quickly, my son?"*  
He said, "**Because the Holy One your God gave me success.**"

*Yitzchak said to Ya`akov, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esav or not."*

*Ya`akov went near to Yitzchak his father.*  
He felt him, and said, "*The voice is Ya`akov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav.*"

*He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy, like his brother, Esav's hands. So he blessed him.*  
He said, "*Are you really my son Esav?*" He said, "**I am.**"

Ya’akov has *a long way to go*. But then again, so do each of us. Do not make excuses for Ya’akov’s sin – or your own. Today’s aliyah teaches us that there is no one so “holy”, so “righteous” that he (or she) is above horrendous and despicable acts – under the “right” set of circumstances.

So do not ever get smug and self-righteous, Dear Reader. Tremble at the evil that you and I are capable of, even knowing the Holy One as we do. Tremble, and be humbled before the Holy One, at the realization that each of us is a potential terrorist, a potential slanderer, a potential thief. Have empathy for Ya'akov and Rivkah even as you condemn their blatant duplicitousness. And realize that no sin – however dark - can either secure the blessing for Ya'akov or separate him from it. The blessing was promised to “the younger” of these brothers long before they drew their first breath, had their first argument, or bartered over a bowl of lentil stew.

Neither does deception (an outward appearance of religiosity, for instance) secure for us the Holy One's blessing, *or* necessarily separate us from His blessing. Sin has its effects, and they are devastating. In tomorrow's concluding aliyah of parsha ***Toldot*** we will examine in detail some of the disastrous effects of the sin of Rivkah and Ya'akov. But the Holy One is *amazing*. He constantly works for our improvement and restoration. He is not appalled or repulsed by us when we sin – He looks upon our sin as an opportunity – and uses the disastrous consequences of our sin to turn us to Him, framing His call to *t'shuvah* and the restoration of intimate relationship.

### ***The Perfume of a Field Blessed by the Holy One***

When at Yitzchak's prompting Ya'akov tentatively steps forward and kisses his father, right before Yitzchak decides it is 'okay' to release the ***b'racha*** [blessing], Yitzchak says a very strange thing. Let's read the account as Torah presents it:

***Vayigash vayishak-lo***

*[Ya'akov] approached and kissed him*

***vayarach et-re'ach begadav v'yevarechehu***

*[Yitzchak] smelled the fragrance of his garments, and blessed him.*

***vayomer re'eh re'ach beni kere'ach sadeh***

*He said, 'See, my son's fragrance is like the perfume of a field*

***asher b'racho Adonai***

*blessed by the Holy One*

**[Genesis 27:27]**

What did Yitzchak smell on Ya'akov that he could liken to '***the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One***'? I can assure you it was not a garment of goat hair. Goat

hair smells like . . . well, let's just say no one would confuse its odor with 'the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One'<sup>3</sup>

There is a legend Beloved that the 'best garment' of Esav, which Rivkah picked out for Ya'akov to wear, was a *very special* garment. The legend says it is the garment of skin with which the Holy One clothed Adam after the Fall [Genesis 3:21]. The legend says this garment was kept and passed down from Shet [Seth] through Noach through Shem, through Avraham, through Yitzchak, to Esav. The legend says the garment covered all sins, and made the wearer smell *kere'ach sadeh asher b'racho Adonai* - like the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One'. Ya'akov needed such a garment. And so, of course, do we all.

### *And This is the Blessing . . .*

The perfume of the field blessed by the Holy One convinced Yitzchak that it was time to release his blessing, and pass the generational baton to the one standing before him. And so release it he did. Here are the words of his blessing as recorded in Torah:

*Veyiten-lecha ha-Elohim mital ha-shamayim*

*'May God grant you the dew of heaven*

*umish'manei ha-aretz*

*and the fat of the earth,*

*v'rov dagan v'tirosh*

*much grain and wine.*

*Y'avducha amim v'yishtachavu lecha l'umim*

*Nations will serve you; governments will bow down to you.*

*heveh gevir l'achecha*

*You shall be like a lord over your brother*

*v'yishtachavu lecha b'nei imecha*

*your mother's children will prostrate themselves to you.*

*orerecha arur*

*Those who curse you are cursed,*

*umevarachecha baruch*

*and those who bless you are blessed.'*

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<sup>3</sup> R. Yochanan said: "There is no harsher scent than the stench of goats that was on his clothing, yet the text says he *"smells the scent of his clothes and blesses him!"* Rather, when the Patriarch Jacob entered to his father, Gan Eden [the Garden of Eden] entered with him ... And when Esau entered to his father, Gehinom [Hell] entered with him. (Midrash Rabbah 65:22). See "Seeing the Future", by Rabbi Ari Kahn, of *Aish Ha-Torah*, available on line at [http://www.aish.com/torahportion/moray/Seeing\\_the\\_Future.asp](http://www.aish.com/torahportion/moray/Seeing_the_Future.asp)

[Genesis 27:28-29]

Note the elements of this blessing. First of all, there are the three aspects of nature: the *mital ha shamayim* [dew of heaven], the *mishmanei ha-eretz* [fat of the earth], and the *rav dagan v tirosh* [abundant grain and wine].

Second, there is the *position of chosen-ness among the goyim* – the people groups of the earth. *Nations* will serve you, and governments will bow down to you.

Third, there is *pre-eminence among the Hebrew peoples* - as Ya'akov's brother [Esav] and all his mother's children [all generations descended from Rivkah – through either Ya'akov or Esav] would be subject to him.

And finally, as was the case with Avraham, all who would bless Ya'akov would be blessed, and all who cursed Ya'akov would be cursed.

### *The Great Omission(s)*

That is all well and good, and nice and everything – **BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LAND?** What about the covenant promise of ownership of **Eretz Yisrael**? And what about the essence of the heritage of Avraham – the heritage of being a blessing to the rest of the world?

Ah, Beloved. Those things could not be passed on to a deceiver. They would indeed be passed on – but only at the appropriate, appointed time of the Holy One. And Ya'akov has some pretty tough lessons to learn, and some life-changing God-encounters to experience first! The blessing of Yitzchak merely launched him on the Great Adventure.

There are no shortcuts, Beloved. And dressing up and pretending to be something or someone you are not may fool *people* – **but it does not fool the Holy One.**

### *Questions For Today's Study*

1. As *Yitzchak* [Isaac] prepared to impart a blessing [Hebrew *b'racha*] to Esav, *Rivkah* [Rebecca] hastily devised a scheme to make sure the bulk of the *b'racha* went to *Ya'akov* [Jacob] instead.

*Rivkah spoke to Ya'akov her son, saying,  
"Behold, I heard your father speak to Esav your brother, saying,  
'Bring me venison, and make me savory food,  
that I may eat, and bless you before the Holy One before my death.'*

*Now therefore, my son, obey my voice  
according to that which I command you.  
Go now to the flock and get me from there two good kids of the goats.*

*I will make them savory food for your father, such as he loves.  
You shall bring it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."*

*Ya`akov said to Rivkah his mother,  
"Behold, Esav my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.  
What if my father touches me? I will seem to him as a deceiver,  
and I would bring a curse on myself, and not a blessing."*

*His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son.  
Only obey [Hebrew, sh'ma] my voice, and go get them for me."*

[A] What exactly was 'at stake' in this passage? Why all the fuss?

[B] What did Yitzchak intend to impart to Esav? [Hint: look ahead to verses 28-29, where Yitzchak imparts to Ya'akov the blessing he intended for Esav].

[C] Is what Yitzchak intended to impart to Esav the "birthright" [Hebrew *b'korah*] which Esav sold for a bowl of "red stuff" a few years previously? Explain your thoughts.

[D] Why do you think Yitzchak asked Esav to go out and hunt game and prepare 'tasty food' that he loved before he would bless him?

[E] What kind of 'curse' was Ya'akov concerned about in verse 12?

[F] In Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Lexicon look up the word that our English Bibles translate as "deceiver" in verse 13. [It is Strong's Hebrew word #8591 *ta`a*, pronounced *taw-ah'*] Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings. Then describe the Hebraic word picture that word presents to us.

[G] Why do you think Rivkah was so adamant that Ya'akov, the youngest of the twins, receive Yitzchak's *b'racha*?

2. Yitzchak [Isaac], though suspicious that he is being tricked, imparts the blessing of the firstborn upon the one whose voice sounds like Ya'akov [Jacob] but who smells, feels and cooks tasty meat dishes like Esav [Esau].

*He came to his father, and said, "My father?" He said, "Here I am.  
Who are you, my son?"*

*Ya`akov said to his father, "I am Esav your firstborn.  
I have done what you asked me to do.  
Please arise, sit and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me."*

*Yitzchak said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?"  
He said, "Because the Holy One your God gave me success."*

*Yitzchak said to Ya`akov, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son,  
whether you are really my son Esav or not."*

*Ya`akov went near to Yitzchak his father.  
He felt him, and said, "The voice is Ya`akov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav."*

*He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy,*

*like his brother, Esav's hands. So he blessed him.  
He said, "Are you really my son Esav?" He said, "I am."*

*He said, "Bring it near to me,  
and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless you."  
He brought it near to him, and he ate. He brought him wine, and he drank.*

*His father Yitzchak said to him, "Come near now, and kiss me, my son."  
He came near, and kissed him.*

*He smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him, and said,  
"Behold, the smell of my son  
Is as the smell of a field that the Holy One has blessed.  
God give you of the dew of the sky, of the fatness of the eretz,  
and plenty of grain and new wine.*

*Let peoples serve you, Nations bow down to you.  
Be lord<sup>4</sup> over your brothers; Let your mother's sons bow down to you.  
Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you."*

[A] When Yitzchak asks Ya'akov, masquerading as Esav, how he found game so quickly, what was Ya'akov's response? What does this tell you about Ya'akov's spiritual state at the time?

[B] List the elements of the blessing Yitzchak speaks over the one he thinks is Esav. With regard to each phrase, interpret what you think was meant - for instance, what 'the dew of the heavens', the 'fatness of the earth', 'grain' and 'wine' symbolize.

[C] Which parts of the **b'racha** [blessing] given at this time relate to the spiritual promises the Holy One made to Avraham?

3. In today's haftarah the Holy One reveals the hidden thoughts of the *kohanim* [priests] who were engaging in public ministry at the time of the prophet Malachi. In their hearts they consider a life of service at the Holy One's altar a "weariness" - a life to "sniff" at.

*You say also, 'Behold, what a weariness it is!  
and you have sniffed at it,' says the Holy One of Hosts;  
"and you have brought that which was taken by violence,  
the lame, and the sick; thus you bring the offering.  
"Should I accept this at your hand?" says the Holy One.  
  
"But the deceiver is cursed, who has in his flock a male,  
and vows, and sacrifices to the Holy One a blemished thing;*

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<sup>4</sup> The word our English Bibles translate as 'lord' in this verse is **g'bir**, *gimel, beit, yod, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #1376. It refers to a ruler, but literally means 'eclipser', 'surpasser', or 'prevailer' - one who *prevails* or *excels* over another or others. The Hebrew verb root is **gabar**, *gimel, beit, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #1396 pronounced *gaw-bar'*, a verb meaning "to prevail, have strength, be strong, be powerful, be mighty, be great." The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 7:18, where we are told that the waters [of the Flood] 'prevailed' [Hebrew, **gabar**] upon the earth.

*for I am a great King," says the Holy One of hosts,  
"and my name is awesome among the nations."*

[A] In verse 13 what does the Holy One to be the inner attitude of the priests' hearts regarding their 'service'?

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the words translated '*weariness*' [Strong's Hebrew word #4972 *mattela'ah*, pronounce *mat-tel-aw-aw*] and '*snuffed*' [KJV] [Strong's Hebrew word #5301, *naphach*, pronounced *naw-fakh*] in verse 13. Write each of the Hebrew words in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, then describe the Hebraic word pictures these words present to us.

[C] How did this *inner heart attitude* of the priests affect the service they offered?

[D] In verse 14 the Holy One pronounces a *curse* [Strong's Hebrew word #779 '*arar*, pronounced *aw-rar*']. On whom is the 'curse' pronounced?

[E] Note that the one who is cursed is called, in English "the deceiver". The word is not the same one translated "deceiver" in our Torah reading, in Genesis 27:12 [it is what Ya'akov did not want his father to think he was]. The word used in the haftarah to describe the kohanim under the Holy One's curse is Strong's Hebrew word #5230 *nakal*, pronounced *naw-kal*'. What parallels do you see between what *the kohanim* of Malachi's day were doing and what Ya'akov did in today's Torah aliyah in order to place himself in a position to obtain something he wanted for himself?

4. In the verses that make up today's B'rit Chadasha reading Shaul of Tarsus describes the criteria the Holy One did not use in choosing to bless Ya'akov rather than Esav. He says:

*Not only so, but Rivkah also conceived by one, by our father Yitzchak.*

*For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad,  
that the purpose of the Holy One according to election might stand,  
not of works, but of him who calls,*

*it was said to her, "**The elder will serve the younger.**"  
Even as it is written, "**Ya'akov I loved, but Esav I hated.**"*

[A] What criteria did the Holy One not consider when deciding whom to bless?

[B] What was the basis for the Holy One's choice of Ya'akov over Esav?

[C] List what you consider the 'good' and 'bad' actions and traits of Ya'akov and Esav. Do you consider one of them 'better' or 'worse' than the other? Explain your answer.

[D] What verses from the TaNaKh is Shaul quoting when he says 'Even as it is written, "Ya'akov I loved, but Esav I hated"?'

[E] In Strong's look up the Greek word that our English Bibles translate as 'hated' in the last verse quoted above from Romans 9. Write the Greek word and the definition(s) given to it by Strong's. In your opinion is this a good translation of the Hebrew phrase '*v'et-Esav saneti*' which is found in Malachi 1:3? [Keep in mind, the same Hebrew verb (*sane*'), is used to describe the way Ya'akov felt about Leah, who was his wife and bore him six children – see Genesis 29:31, 33]

*May all the blessings you are privileged to impart  
be distributed according to His Divine plan, not yours or mine.*

### ***The Rabbi's son***

### ***Meditation for Today's Study***

Psalm 107:21-30

*Let them praise the Holy One for his lovingkindness,  
For his wonderful works to the children of men!  
Let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with singing.*

*Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters;  
These see the Holy One's works, and his wonders in the deep.  
For he commands, and raises the stormy wind,  
Which lifts up its waves. They mount up to the sky; they go down again to the depths.  
Their soul melts away because of trouble.  
They reel back and forth, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.  
Then they cry to the Holy One in their trouble,  
and he brings them out of their distress.*

*He makes the storm a calm, so that its waves are still.  
Then they are glad because it is calm,  
So he brings them to their desired haven.*