

THE SEARCH FOR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week's parsha begins the saga of the long, almost endless struggle between Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov buys the birthright from a hungry Esav and then, coached by his mother, Rivka, he dresses like Esav and receives blessings from his father Isaac.

I have received numerous letters throughout the years pondering those actions. Indeed, Yaakov himself is wary of acting in a seemingly devious manner and is reassured by his righteous mother who accepts full responsibility for his actions.

When Esav arrives for the blessings, his father tells him that his younger brother cleverly took all the blessings, but Esav, despondent as he may be declares to his father, "He (Jacob) took away my birthright and see, now he took away my blessing!" He adds, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Isaac answered, and said to Esau, "Behold, a lord have I made him over you, and all his kin have I given him as servants; with grain and wine have I supported him, and for you, where -- what can I do, my son?". And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau raised his voice and wept. (Genesis 27:36-38).

I often wondered about the lesson of this repartee. Esav, clearly angered by Yaakov's cunning, still has clarity of mind to ask for a blessing. Yitzchak seems to demur, inferring that there is nothing left. But Esav prevails by pleading, even crying for a blessing. And only then does his father acquiesce and bless him as well.

Was there a blessing left or not? Can pleading with the saintly patriarch produce a previously non-existent blessing? Maybe Esav's tears taught a lesson even for the children of Yaakov?

In the summer of 2001 30,000 Boy Scouts joined together in Virginia for a national Boy Scout Jamboree. Among the myriad groups of scouts who attend this event that occurs every four years are many Jewish Scouts as well. Mike Paretsky, a Vice Chairman of the GNYC Jewish Committee on scouting, was the kosher food liaison to the jamboree. Special food was ordered from O'Fishel caterers of Baltimore, so that the Jewish scouts would be able to nourish their bodies as well.

One of the scoutmasters, a Jewish man caught a glimpse of the kosher offerings. He had never eaten a kosher meal in his life, yet when he saw the special meals, something stirred. He and his troops were being served pork-this and bacon-that for breakfast, lunch and supper, and all of a sudden this man decided he was sick of the monotonous treif stuff. He wanted to eat kosher. Scoutmaster Paretsky gladly let him partake in a meal, but that was not enough for the fellow. The

man decided to keep kosher during the entire jamboree!

Mr. Paretsky agreed to accommodate the neophyte kosherphile, but a skeptic approached him. "Mike," he said, "why are you wasting your kosher food on this fellow? He is not going to eat kosher after this is over, and he observes absolutely nothing! Why waste the food on him?"

Mike answered with an amazing story of the Chofetz Chaim. When Russian soldiers entered the town of Radin, Jewish townsfolk prepared kosher meals for the Jewish soldiers in the Czar's army. Soon their acts of charity seemed to fly in their face as they saw the soldiers devour the food and then stand on line to receive the forbidden Russian rations.

When they complained to the Chofetz Chaim and threatened to stop preparing kosher food, he reflected with an insight that must be passed on to generations.

"Every mitzvah that a Jew does, every good deed and every bit of kosher that he eats is not a fleeting act. It is an eternity. No matter what precedes or ensues, we must cherish each proper action of a Jew."

The wayward son, Esav is at first told by his father that there are no blessings. But he cries bitterly and cannot fathom that fact. "Is there nothing left?" He asks. It cannot be. And he was right. There is always some blessing left to be found. No matter how far one has strayed, no matter how bleak a situation looks. There is always blessing. We must pursue it, even cry for it, and when we receive the tiniest blessing it may seem trivial, even fleeting, but it is with us for eternity.

L'zecher Nishmat Our Zeda Avraham Yehoshua Heschel ben Yehuda HaCohen by his Granchildren Miriam , Josh, Tamar and Shlomo Hauser Efrat , Israel

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