

A SMART BRACHA

by Rabbi Label Lam

And when Essav was forty years old, he took as a wife Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite, and they were a source of spiritual aggravation to Yitzchok and Rivka. And it came to pass when Yitzchok had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Essav, his older son, and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am!" And he said, "See, now, I have aged; I know not the day of my death. Now sharpen, if you please your gear- your sword and your bow- and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so my soul may bless you before I die."

Now Rivka was listening as Yitzchok spoke to Essav his son; and Essav went to the field to hunt game to bring. But Rivka had said to Yaakov her son, saying, "Behold I heard your father speaking to your brother saying, 'Bring me game and make me some delicacies to eat, and I will bless you in the presence of HASHEM before my death.'" So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch me from there two choice young kids of the goats, and I will make of them delicacies for your father, as he loves. Then bring it to your father and he shall eat so that he may bless you before he dies." (Breishis 27:1-10)

This narrative of the "battle of the blessing" begs to be understood. Why is Yitzchok still willing to bless Essav even after he is spiritual vexed by his bad choice of wives? Even if he is blind, is he blind to the faults of his son Essav? I think we can make a strong case that he was well aware of Essav's personality and behavior defects. Why then does he offer him first dibs at the blessing? Why does Yitzchok request a meaty meal "the way he likes it" in order to bless Essav? We don't find that requirement any place else. Why does Yitzchok tell him to pick up his equipment to go out and hunt? He could have just sent him out and he would have to have brought his gear to accomplish the task! Why does he send Essav out to hunt something when we learn immediately afterwards Rivka already had a couple of steaks in the freezer? Why the whole hunting expedition if there was food on hand for the occasion?

It was the Eve of Simchas Torah and we were on our way Up State for a Hotel Program. On our way out of town we stopped by to receive a Bracha from a truly great person Rabbi Hershel Mashinsky ztl, who was a champion of charitable causes and master teacher for more than fifty years. He was sitting in his Sukkah when we came in and beaming with joy. He was telling my children that the reason why we dance in circles with the Torah on Simchas Torah is because "we want the Torah to go all over the world, kinderlach!"

Just then one of my little boys reached his hand into a dish where there were some sugar cubes and grabbed one. I immediately sent my hand out to stop him but the cube was already heading for his mouth. A subtle and sudden tension was created by the power struggle and immediately Rabbi Mashinsky addressed the child and said, "Do you know what Bracha to make?" My son acknowledged with a nod of the head and the Rabbi urged him on approvingly and so he made timid little Bracha to which we all responded, "Amen!" And Rabbi Mashinsky then stroked his face in a most precious way and he told him in the most endearing tone, "That was a smart Bracha!"

That phrase stays with us many years later whenever we wish to offer a child some encouraging praise.

Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch ztl. explains; that Yitzchok wanted to bless his son so that he should exercise his talents and interests in the service of HASHEM and not just for selfish and self indulgent pursuits. We already know two important facts about Essav and that is that firstly he was a hunter and secondly he exerted himself greatly to honor his father. Yitzchok like many other parents had to work with what was. He would have loved to give a Bracha for his devotion to Torah study or kindness, but here is a hunter. If he can hunt some game for the sake of honoring his father then the blessing has hope to expand what he was already inclined to do, turning it into an act worthy magnification. It could be that Yitzchok had in mind that his Bracha should be effectively focused on what his son was already dead set on doing, making it **"a smart Bracha."** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.