

# ESAV'S GAME

by Shlomo Katz

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**Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Toldos**

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Today's Learning:

Bava Metzia 9:8-9

Orach Chaim 543:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 113

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Kilayim 7

This week's parashah is the first of several which addresses the rivalry between Yaakov and his twin brother Esav. The Torah tells us (25:28): *"Yitzchak loved Esav for game was in his mouth; but Rivka loved Yaakov."*

Many commentaries seek an understanding of Yitzchak's love for Esav. In particular, asks R' David Kronglas z"l (Mashgiach of Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore; died 1973), how could Yitzchak have shown such love for Esav when we are taught that Yitzchak's primary characteristic was the attribute of strict justice? (Avraham, by contrast, exemplified great kindness, and Yaakov combined the traits of his father and grandfather.) Surely that justice should have been meted out against Esav!

R' Kronglas explains (quoting the work Sha'arei Orah) that Yitzchak loved Esav -- or more correctly, Esav's future deeds - for Esav's persecution of Yaakov's descendants would serve as atonement for those descendants' sins. To paraphrase the verse, "And Yitzchak loved Esav, for Yaakov's

descendants are prey in his mouth." No matter how terrible the persecution of the exile, it is preferable to the "fires" of Gehinom. Therefore, strange as it may sound, we owe a certain debt of gratitude to our oppressors. [Nevertheless, those oppressors will be punished, because their intentions are evil.]

Alternatively, the above verse can be read, "And Yitzchak loved Esav, for Esav was prey in his (Yitzchak's) mouth." In other words, because Yitzchak lived by the attribute of strict justice, he loved anyone who caused that aspect of Hashem's powers to be revealed. Esav, by his wicked deeds, was sure to cause (albeit indirectly) a sanctification of G-d's Name and the revelation of Hashem's justice through the terrible punishment that awaits him (Esav). This, Yitzchak knew, would deter Yaakov's children from sinning. (Sichot Chochmah U'mussar p.14)

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*"Esav came in from the field, and he was exhausted." (25:29)*

The gemara (Bava Batra 16b) records: Rabbi Yochanan said, "Esav committed five sins on that day [i.e., the day on which he sold the birthright]: he committed adultery with a betrothed girl, he murdered a man, he denied G-d, he denied the resurrection of the dead; and he rejected the birthright."

R' Avigdor Miller z"l asks: Would Yitzchak have permitted such a child to remain in his home? Is it really possible that he was not aware of Esav's deeds?

The answer is that each of Esav's sins could be understood in a meritorious light. Before the Torah was given, there was no such thing as betrothal. Thus, although the girl in question had accepted a marriage proposal from someone else, she was not betrothed in a halachic sense, and no adultery was committed. Why, then, do the Sages say that Esav committed adultery? Because given the Torah's great expectations of someone of Esav's family and upbringing, it was as if he committed a grave sin.

The man whom Esav murdered was none other than Nimrod. Esav arguably performed a service to mankind by killing Nimrod, and he also avenged Avraham's honor, for Nimrod had tried to kill Avraham. Thus, this "sin" too could be overlooked.

Esav's denial of G-d was manifested only by his selling the birthright (which represented the right to serve as kohen), but this action could also be taken as a sign of humility - as if Esav considered himself undeserving. Similarly, one could (and Yitzchak did) mistakenly believe that Esav did not deny the resurrection or despise the birthright, but simply felt himself undeserving or intimidated. Esav thus looked "kosher," and therefore Yitzchak did not expel him from his house.

In contrast, the Torah portrays Yaakov as a crafty and devious individual. Yet, Yaakov was quite the opposite. This, too, is a result of the strict standards to which the Torah holds the righteous. Also, the Torah's portrayal of Yaakov and Esav foreshadows the way that Yaakov's descendants would be

(and are) seen by the gentiles during the Jews' periods of exile. (Rejoice O Youth! p.173-74, paragraphs 347-49)

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*"Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees and My teachings." (26:5)*

The gemara (Yoma 28b) derives from this verse that Avraham observed the entire Torah before it was given, "even," says the gemara, "the mitzvah of Eruv Tavshillin" (setting aside a bit of food before yom tov which falls on Friday and reciting the formula that permits one to prepare on yom tov for Shabbat). Why is the mitzvah of Eruv Tavshillin singled out?

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (the "Mirrer Mashgiach"; died 1936) explains: One of the greatest wonders of the world is that G-d has made the achievement of spiritual greatness dependent upon the performance of seemingly mundane, even dry, deeds. Even a "chore" such as preparing for Shabbat and Yom Tov can be spiritually uplifting.

However, whether one's deeds will succeed in uplifting him depends upon his observance of the laws, even laws as simple as Eruv Tavshillin. Avraham, the gemara is teaching, understood this well. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Rashei Yeshivat Mir p. 16)

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*"Yaakov replied to Rivka, his mother, 'But my brother Esav is a hairy man and I am a smooth-skinned man.'" (27:11)*

R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; died 1974) writes: The Torah's account of how Yaakov received the blessings which Yitzchak had planned to give to Esav demonstrates the delicate balance between our obligation to have emunah / to place our trust in G-d, and our obligation to act on our own behalf.

Rivka knew through prophecy that Yaakov was to receive the blessings, and that Yaakov's attempt to deceive Yitzchak would not result in his being cursed (notwithstanding Yaakov's fears). Furthermore, it is evident that a great miracle was occurring at this time: Yaakov and Esav were 63 years old at the time of this episode, yet Yitzchak was still unable to tell them apart! (Even his blindness should not have had such an effect after living together with Yaakov and Esav for more than six decades.) The only possible explanation is that Hashem "blinded" Yitzchak's other senses, as well, because He wanted Yaakov to receive the blessings. Even though Yitzchak tried to identify the person who stood before him claiming to be Esav, and even though Yitzchak recognized Yaakov's voice, Hashem ensured that Yitzchak would nevertheless be fooled.

And yet, Yaakov was constantly afraid of being recognized. Despite the prophecy that had been revealed to his mother, Yaakov took the precaution of dressing in Esav's clothes and covering his

arms with hairy goats' skins. Why? Because even though everything is in Hashem's hands, a person is obligated to strive on his own behalf.

Why? There are two reasons: firstly, a person thus becomes a "partner" with Hashem in the running of the world. Also, this is Hashem's way of increasing the reward of those who do achieve a high level of emunah. As long as man appears to succeed based on his own efforts, emunah is more difficult to achieve, and therefore deserves greater reward.

R' Levenstein adds: When a great tzaddik or talmid chacham dies, everybody feels the loss; it seems as if a certain amount of Torah and spirituality are lost forever. However, this is not true. This feeling is only a test devised by Hashem, designed to see who will make the added effort required to grow spiritually now that an obvious source of support is gone. So, too, Hashem hides the aid that He gives us, making it appear as if we are alone, waiting to see who will find Him. (Ohr Yechezkel, Vol. 3, pp. 115-116, Ma'amar Asi'at HaSibot V'HaEmunah BeHashgacha)

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In the Friday night zemirot composed by the Arizal we read: "To the right and to the left, and in between them, the bride." The "bride" presumably is Shabbat, but what is "to the right and to the left"?

Rav Pinchus David Horowitz z"l (the "Bostoner Rebbe"---see page 4) explains:

In kabbalah, the "right" and the "left" represent the attributes of "chessed" (loving-kindness) and "gevurah" (strength) respectively. In our history, Avraham epitomized chessed (the right) and Yitzchak, gevurah (the left).

Avraham fathered Yishmael, who, according to the midrash, refused to accept the Torah because it outlawed adultery. Adultery is the result of chessed (love) gone awry (see Vayikra 20:17). Yitzchak fathered Esav, who refused to accept the Torah because it prohibited murder, which is the excessive use of "gevurah."

The nations on the right and the left observe their sabbaths to the right and the left of Shabbat, i.e., on Friday and Sunday, respectively. It is to this that the Arizal's song refers.

Each of these three nations--Yishmael, Esav, and ourselves-- claims to have the true Torah of Avraham. When we observe Shabbat, says the Bostoner Rebbe, we add to it a few minutes from Friday and a few minutes from Sunday in order to solidify our claim. (quoted in Shoshelet Boston p.273)

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**R' Pinchus David Halevi Horowitz z"l (The First "Bostoner Rebbe")**

born Elul 5636 (1876) - died 8 Kislev 5702 (1941)

R' Pinchus David was born in Yerushalayim, where his maternal grandfather was the "Lelover Rebbe." His teachers included his uncle R' David Biderman (later the "Lelover Rebbe"), R' Shneur Zalman of Lublin (the "Torat Chessed"), R' Shmuel Salant, and the kabbalist R' Mordechai of Rachmestrivka.

In his youth, R' Pinchus David learned 18 hours every day. In the remaining hours he took care of his physical needs and taught himself engineering and construction, which became his livelihood. Among the buildings which he designed and built were the first two-story apartments in the Meah Shearim neighborhood of Yerushalayim. (Incidentally, that neighborhood derives its name from this week's parashah (26:12).)

At the turn of the century, most of Yerushalayim's Jews learned Torah full time and were supported by charitable organizations (known as "kollelim") based in Europe. When the two major kollelim contemplated a merger, a dispute arose between them and the citizens of Yerushalayim over how charity funds would be allocated after the two charities joined forces. A din Torah / hearing before a rabbinical court was called before R' Eliyahu Feinstein (grandfather of Rabbis Joseph B. and Ahron Soloveitchik and uncle of R' Moshe Feinstein), and R' Pinchus David, then 36 years old, was chosen to travel to Europe to represent his hometown.

R' Pinchus David successfully argued his case, and Yerushalayim prevailed. However, before R' Pinchus David could return home, World War I broke out. R' Pinchus David, an Austrian citizen by heredity, was drafted into the Austrian Army. Planning his escape, he volunteered to travel to neutral Greece as a spy. (He spoke Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Turkish and Arabic.) One of the more obvious miracles along the way occurred when he stepped off the road to wash his hands for the melaveh malkah meal and thus escaped notice by a passing patrol. From Greece, he made his way to neutral United States, arriving in June, 1915. (Source: "Shoshelet Boston") (A dvar Torah from R' Pinchus David appears on page 3.) To be continued . . .

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The staff of Hamaayan extends its warm wishes to Hamaayan's birthplace, Young Israel Shomrai Emunah of Greater Washington, on that congregation's 50th birthday.

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