

# WHO DESERVES A BLESSING?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Toldos

### Who deserves a blessing?

In this parashah, we read about the relationship of Yitzchak to his children, Yaakov and Esav. The Torah relates (25:28), "Yitzchak loved Esav, for game was in his mouth." How could a great tzaddik such as Yitzchak, from whom the Shechinah did not depart for a moment, love a completely wicked person such as Esav? R' Yosef Gikatilla z"l (Spain; 1248-1310) explains: Yitzchak was a prophet and could see the future. He saw that Yaakov's descendants would sin and anger G-d. When Yitzchak saw that Yaakov's descendants would be exiled in the hands of Esav's descendants [Rome], he rejoiced, for exile atones for sin. Yitzchak said, "I am pleased with all the suffering that Esav's descendants will cause Yaakov's descendants, so that Yaakov's descendants will be cleansed in this world [not in Gehinom]. In this light, "game was in his mouth" means "he will trap them."

From here we see that, although the attribute associated with Yitzchak is "Pachad" / "Fear" [which is associated with Strict Justice], that attribute of G-d is intended for the good of the Jewish People [for it saves us from Gehinom]. Therefore it is written (Mishlei 28:14), "Fortunate is the man who experiences pachad always."

This also explains, R' Gikatilla continues, why Yitzchak asked Esav to bring food for him to eat before blessing Esav. Usually, one eats after praying! However, Yitzchak's intention was to help him focus his blessings purely on the enjoyments of the material world, so that Esav's descendants would inherit this world and persecute Yaakov's descendants, which would be for their own benefit in the long run.

Why then did G-d arrange that Yaakov would get the blessings? Because, if Esav alone had received the blessings, the persecution at his hands would have been too much to bear. The Strict Justice that Yitzchak represents--although for our own good--is too strict. This is the idea behind Avraham, who represents Chessed / Kindness binding (i.e., constraining) Yitzchak at the akeidah. (Sha'arei Orah: Sha'ar 5)

\*\*\*\*\*

"Esav became one who understands hunting . . ." (25:27)

Rashi z"l explains: "Understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth. Esav would ask Yitzchak, 'Father how should salt and straw be tithed?' Consequently, Yitzchak believed Esav to be very punctilious in observing the divine ordinances."

R' Yosef Teomim z"l (author of the halachic work Pri Megadim; died 1792) notes the irony in the fact that Esav inquired about straw and salt. Ma'asrot / tithes are required to be given only from types of produce which are stored for use in the future. Straw is not such a crop. Thus, the prophet Ovadiah (Ovadiah 1:18) states, "The House of Yaakov will be a fire and the House of Yosef a flame -- and \*the House of Esav like straw\*; they will kindle among them and consume them; and there will be no survivor of the House of Esav, for Hashem has spoken." The House of Esav is called "straw" because it has no permanent existence.

Similarly, salt symbolizes Esav's lack of a future. Land that is too salty has no agricultural use. [S'dom was destroyed with salt so that its destruction would be complete and final.] So, too, Esav will leave no legacy in the long run. (Tevat Gomeh)

\*\*\*\*\*

"Yaakov simmered a stew, and Esav came in from the field, and he was exhausted." (25:29)

Rashi z"l writes that Esav was exhausted from having committed murder that day. He writes further that Avraham Avinu had died that very day. Hashem took him five years early so that he would not see his grandson Esav turn bad.

Midrash Rabbah seems to understand the sequence of events differently. According to the midrash, it was Avraham's death that caused Esav to sin. Esav reasoned that the death of someone so righteous as Avraham indicated that the world has no Judge and no justice. R' Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l (1870-1953; rosh yeshiva in Slutsk and Kletsk, Poland, and later in Yerushalayim) explains that there is no contradiction. Esav was in any case on a path that would lead him astray, so Hashem did Avraham a kindness by taking him from this earth so that he would not see what became of his grandson. However, people who do bad things generally seek a way to rationalize their behavior, and Avraham's death gave Esav the excuse he needed.

R' Moshe Tzuriel shlita (former mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) uses R' Meltzer's explanation to resolve a seeming conflict between two Talmudic statements about the sage Rabbi Elisha ben Avuyah, also known as "Acher." The Gemara (Kiddushin 39b) states that Acher became a heretic when he saw a pig defiling the corpse of one of the Sages (one of the "Ten Martyrs"). Elsewhere, however, the Gemara (Chagigah 15b) states that Acher became a heretic because he read heretical books. R' Tzuriel explains: Acher was destined to become a heretic because of the books he read. But, he needed to rationalize his departure from loyalty to Torah, and seeing the

defilement of the corpse of one of the Sages was his excuse. (Be'urei Aggadot: Kiddushin 39b)

\*\*\*\*\*

"Rivka was listening as Yitzchak spoke to Esav his son; and Esav went to the field to hunt game to bring." (27:5)

R' Moshe ibn Chaviv z"l (Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim; died 1696) asks: If Yitzchak intended to bless Esav, what good could it do Yaakov to have received the blessings surreptitiously?

Also, why isn't our verse in the reverse order-- "Esav went to the field to hunt game to bring; and Rivka was listening as Yitzchak spoke to Esav his son"--thus completing one thread of the story (Yitzchak talking to Esav) before beginning the second thread (Rivka "conspiring" with Yaakov)?

He explains: Yitzchak told Esav (verse 3), "Now sharpen, if you please, your gear -- your sword and your bow -- and go out to the field and hunt game for me." The word for "your sword" is "telyecha," which also means "your hanging thing." According to the midrash, Yitzchak was speaking to G-d as well as to Esav: "G-d, it all depends ('hangs') on You. He whom You wish to bless shall be blessed."

On the phrase, "Esav went to the field to hunt game to bring," the midrash comments that "to bring" seems to be superfluous. These words teach that Esav's plan was that if he were unsuccessful in trapping a kosher animal, he would bring a non-kosher, or even a stolen, animal.

"Now Rivka was listening as Yitzchak spoke to Esav his son." Rivka understood that it was Yitzchak's intention to give the berachah only to the son that was worthy. "And [Rivka saw that] Esav went to the field to hunt game to bring." She realized Esav's intentions and thus knew that he was not worthy of the berachah. Therefore she understood that Yaakov would succeed in receiving the berachah. (Derashot Maharam Chaviv)

\*\*\*\*\*

"He [Yitzchak] smelled the fragrance of his [Yaakov's] garments and blessed him, saying, 'See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed'." (27:27)

Rashi z"l comments: "Surely there is no more offensive smell than that of washed goat skins. However, the Torah implicitly tells us that the perfume of the Garden of Eden entered the room with Yaakov."

Why would Yitzchak call the fragrance of Gan Eden "the fragrance of a field"? R' Yitzchak Isaac Liebes z"l (noted American posek) explains:

The Torah relates that just before Yitzchak met his wife Rivka, "Yitzchak went out to pray in the field towards evening." For what was he praying? He was beseeching G-d that his forthcoming marriage

would produce worthy children who would serve Hashem. Until the moment described in our verse, Yitzchak did not know whether his prayer had been answered, but when he smelled the fragrance of Gan Eden, he knew. Then he said, "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field." This is what I prayed for that day in the field. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

\*\*\*\*\*

## Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Moshe Nussbaum/Reisher z"l, best known as the author of Mishlei Yaakov, a collection of the teachings of the Dubno Maggid z"l, grew up in Yerushalayim in the mid-1800s. Around 1868, he traveled to Europe as a fundraiser, and there he wrote Sha'arei Yerushalayim--a sort of guide book combining Talmudic teachings about Eretz Yisrael with his own experiences in, and observations of, the Holy Land. The following is an excerpt:

There is a beautiful custom in the holy city of Yerushalayim to go on Erev Shabbat (Friday) to go to the place of our Holy Temple, i.e., the Kotel, from which the Shechinah never departed, after having immersed in the mikvah and donned white garments. Upon arriving there, they prostrate themselves and bow humbly and recite the verse (Bereishit 28:17), "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d and this is the gate of the heavens." Four amot [6-8 feet] away, they remove their shoes; then they approach the wall, the support for our Holy Temple, and kiss the holy stones very lovingly, but at the same time enveloped in trepidation and awe. They recite Shir Ha'shirim, also Tehilim, until completion, in order to extricate the rose from the thorns [see Shir Ha'shirim 2:2]. Then they pray minchah with a humble spirit, and each one recites a prayer for his relatives in the Diaspora. Then they go to shul for Kabbalat Shabbat, though some remain there to welcome Shabbat with song; most of them are Sephardim. Some go there every day after their prayers to recite supplications.

It's customary in Yerushalayim to go on every Erev Rosh Chodesh to the burial place of our matriarch Rachel--a two-hour journey--and to spend the night. This is done all year long, as well, and especially on her yahrzeit, 11 Marcheshvan. At night, the entire book of Tehilim is recited, word-by-word, in a pleasant tune. Everyone prays for himself, his household and his family, and writes his name on a piece of paper and leaves it there. They also light many oil lamps. In the morning, they pray with a minyan, kiss the monument, and go their way in peace. The stone which Yaakov Avinu a"h placed there as a monument, as is written in the Torah (Bereishit 35:20), stands there to this day, approximately five amot [7.5-10 feet] tall and six amot [9-12 feet] long and covered in plaster.

---

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with

5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

*Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.*