

WHY IS BILL GATES THE RICHEST MAN IN AMERICA?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"G-d should give you from the dew of the Heavens, and from the fat of the land..." [27:28]
"...behold, from the fat of the land should be your dwelling, and from the dew of Heaven
above..." [27:39]*

As we see, there is a strong similarity between this section of the blessing given to *Yaakov*, and that given to *Esav* his brother. Indeed, we see that there is wealth given to *Yaakov*, and wealth given to *Esav* - there are rich and poor both among Jews and non-Jews.

At the same time, these verses contain an important difference, one that depends upon the different brothers. We know that earlier in the week's reading, *Esav* sold his birthright - a position of spiritual leadership. The spiritual heritage of *Avraham* and *Yitzhak* was therefore given over to *Yaakov* and his descendants. *Yaakov* was the one who was responsible for offering sacrifices to G-d, and it was his descendants who would build the Temple - even though that Temple would be "a House of Prayer for all Nations."

It was critical that he who held the birthright receive the first blessing. The blessing which *Yitzchak* gave to *Esav* gave him wealth - "from the fat of the land should be your dwelling." Why is Bill Gates the richest man in America? Because it was his "*Mazel*" to receive the best part of this blessing. Others, of course, don't share his *Mazel*!

The blessing given to *Yaakov* does not merely give wealth. Rather, it says that "G-d should give you from the dew of Heaven..." First it mentions G-d, and then Heaven, and only then the earth. In addition, the name used here is *Elokim*, G-d, rather than *HaShem* (often translated 'the L-rd').

In Hebrew, *Elokim* can mean a leader, or even an idolatrous god. The name which we use only in prayer, and otherwise refer to as *HaShem* ("the Name"), is the "personal" name of G-d - similar to "The President" vs. "Bill Clinton." The *Midrash* tells us that the use of *Elokim* vs. *HaShem* can often indicate a balance between justice and mercy. This makes sense - "the President" is a great deal more formal than "Bill," while the latter indicates a close relationship.

So *Rashi* explains that the use of "*Elokim*" in this case is quite deliberate: with judgement, meaning that if it is appropriate for him he will be given wealth, and if not, not. Concerning *Esav*, the promise is that he will be given wealth independent of whether he is good or evil.

We might think that this means only righteous Jews should be blessed - but we see that this is not true. The *Chofetz Chaim* explains that the intent here is not that good people be given wealth, but those for whom there is a spiritual benefit be given wealth. What does *Rashi* mean that it is "appropriate" for a certain person to receive money? The answer is, whether it is spiritually beneficial.

We know that "the righteous of all nations will receive a share in the World to Come" - everyone can be spiritual, and come close to G-d. Jews, on the other hand, are pushed. Everything that happens to a Jew is intended to direct him or her to G-d - even the number of dollars in the bank depends upon spiritual factors! In the '70s, American cults were filled with Jews and even today, representatives of many cults say that half of their adherents are Jews [see Hanoch Teller, "Give Peace a Stance"].

Why? Because Jews are "pushed" towards meaning and spirituality. There is no question that non-Jews can be spiritual, and can gain a share in the World to Come. Perhaps the reason that Jews are asked to do more, is because we have the wind at our backs...

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