

YOU THREW IT OUT?!

by Rabbi Berel Wein

How many times has it occurred that a piece of paper or another type of item that you may have believed to be unimportant at the time and thus carelessly misplaced or thrown out, turns out to be the one important item necessary for your records or accomplishments? What is unimportant and of little consequence at one moment in life may assume great value at a later stage of life. This is pretty much the obvious lesson that Eisav's sale of his birthright to Yaakov, as recorded in this week's parsha, imparts to us.

The Torah tells us that when Eisav sold the birthright to Yaakov he had no regrets and no hesitation in so doing. The birthright was then of no value to him. The pot of lentils, the good time, the night out with the boys, his sexual conquests, these were the important things in his life. So he throws away the item that in later life he will most crave and long to find - his birthright, his soul, his very being. He later implores his father for the blessing that has already been given away to Yaakov, the blessing that is the right of the birthright to obtain. "Have you only one blessing, father?" he roars and entreats. And Yitzchak answers him that the blessing of Yaakov is part of the birthright. There are other blessings that Eisav will receive but the one blessing that he wishes to have, now later in his life when the passions have cooled and the millions have been banked and he searches for eternity and serenity, that blessing he cannot obtain. He threw it away with his birthright when he felt that the latter was worthless to him.

In Jewish national life and in the personal lives of countless individual Jews, the birthright of Israel - the Torah and all of holy traditions, customs and ways - has often been discarded in favor of seemingly certain gain and progress. Every time that this has happened it has turned out badly for individual Jew and for the Jewish people as a whole. The pot of lentils, of all of the "isms" of the Jewish world over the past century and a half, turned out to be of little value in comparison to the squandered birthright.

Eisav's cry of: "Have you no other blessing for me?" is heard from the depths of the souls of countless Jews today. All of the alternate forms of Judaism, the phony kabbalists and the guitar-playing, kitsch prayer services are a symptom of this deep longing for spirituality, meaning and self-worth in life. But having sold out and discarded the birthright, many times without even realizing that there was once a birthright that was abandoned by their grandparents for a pot of lentils, all of the new blessings somehow turn out to unsatisfying and non-propagating. Even though those who created and support Operation Birthright to bring American youth to visit Israel were unaware of this

profound article of mine, I nevertheless find it heartening that they chose to name the program Birthright. Only by treating our Torah birthright seriously and respectfully can we hope to achieve the blessings of our father Yitzchak in our personal and national lives.

Shabat shalom.

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