

TOLDOS (GENESIS 25:19-28:9)

Something Smells Rotten in the State of Beersheba

2009 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Isaac and his wife Rebecca settled in Beersheba. For the first several years Rebecca was barren. Eventually their prayers were answered (See "An 'FFB' Marries a 'BT'") and Rebecca gave birth to twins.

The boys grew up; Esau was a man who knew how to trap; a man of the field, while Jacob was pure-hearted man, who dwelled in the house (of Torah study). Isaac loved Esau because he ate what he trapped, but Rebecca loved Jacob. (Genesis, 25:27-28)

Let's read these verses again, and incorporate the observations of Rashi's commentary:

Esau was a man who knew how to trap (i.e., he entrapped and deceived his father with pretenses of righteousness); *a man of the field* (i.e., an idle man, who spent his time in the field, hunting with a bow and arrow), *while Jacob was a wholesome man*, (an honest man, unlearned in the art of deception) *sitting in tents* (studying Torah in the tents – the Yeshiva – of Shem and Ever, the righteous son and great-grandson of Noah). *Isaac loved Esau because he ate what he trapped* (Isaac was taken in by Esau's deception) *but Rebecca loved Jacob*.

Rebecca had grown up among dishonest people, and she recognized her older son for what he was. Therefore she was very concerned when she learned that Isaac was preparing to bless Esau:

He (Isaac) said, "I am old; I don't know when I am going to die... Go to the field and capture an animal for me. Prepare for me some good-tasting food, the way I like it. Bring it to me so I can eat it so that I can bless you before I die." (Ibid. 27:3-4)

The blessing of a holy man like Isaac carries a great deal of weight. If Esau were to receive Isaac's blessing, he might have the ability to rule over Jacob – or worse – to destroy him. Rebecca could not allow that to happen. First of all, Esau didn't deserve those blessings. Secondly, those blessings were supposed to go to the firstborn. True, Esau was older than Jacob. However, unbeknownst to Isaac, Esau thought so little of his privileges and responsibilities as the firstborn that he had actually SOLD the birthright to Jacob in exchange for a bowl of beans! (See "Red Beans and Redskins".) As such, Esau no longer possessed the legal status of the firstborn. He was not entitled to Isaac's blessing.

With G-d's permission, Rebecca set out to save Isaac's blessing for Jacob. In order to do that, they had to take advantage of Isaac's blindness. She instructed Jacob to bring her some meat that she would prepare to taste like venison. She placed goat hides on smooth-skinned Jacob so he would feel like his hairy brother if Isaac touched him. She dressed him in Esau's special garment, which had once belonged to Adam.

The ruse went well. Jacob brought the food to Isaac. He felt Jacob's hands; they were hairy like Esau's. He kissed Jacob, and smelled Esau's garment. "*Behold,*" he said, "*the smell of my son is like the smell of the field that G-d blessed.*" (Ibid. 27:27) Rashi explains that the smell of the Garden of Eden entered Isaac's tent together with Jacob. (Sifsei Chachomim, a commentary on Rashi, says that the garment, originally worn by Adam, still carried the fragrance of the Garden.)

Soon after Jacob received the blessings, Esau showed up. Isaac was, at first, confused and afraid:

"... Who are you?" "I am your firstborn, Esau." Isaac was extremely frightened. "Who, then, was it who hunted meat and brought it to me and I ate, before you arrived? I blessed him, and indeed, he will be blessed!" (Ibid. verses 32-33)

A few questions: What was Isaac afraid of? What did Isaac mean by, "*and indeed, he will be blessed*"?

Rashi tells us that the reason for Isaac's fear is that when he realized that he had blessed the "wrong" son, he saw *Gehinnom* (loose and largely inaccurate translation: "hell") open up under Esau.

Kli Yakar explains that Isaac had warned Esau to make sure that the meat he would bring would not be stolen. He told him to go out and capture an ownerless wild animal. Isaac wanted nothing to do with anything that had been stolen. But he was especially concerned on that particular day. Our Sages tell us that this event took place on the date that would some day be Passover. A Passover offering is invalid if it belongs to someone else.

Esau was unsuccessful in his attempts to trap a wild animal. Instead, he decided to steal one. "After all," he must have reasoned, "my father will never know the difference. I have managed to fool him all these years. He thinks I'm a good guy! He doesn't know what a bum I really am!"

Well, you CAN fool some of the people – even prophets! – some of the time, but with Isaac, the gig was up! *Gehinnom*, the infernal Abyss, opened up under Esau! Isaac refused to eat the food that Esau brought. It was obviously stolen! Why else would G-d send such a frightening sign as Esau brought the meat in?!

Jacob, on the other hand, had come in with meat that was NOT stolen. The meat was from goats that belonged to his mother. She GAVE them to Jacob for Isaac. And this, explains Kli Yakar, is why Jacob smelled like the Garden of Eden. His offering was like the offerings of Adam. Since Adam was the first

person on earth, he owned everything. It was impossible for him to bring a stolen offering because there was no one to steal from!

Now that Isaac understood the true difference between his two sons, he saw things very differently. He now, finally, knew that his older son was a thief. He learned that Esau had sold the birthright to Jacob. He now understood that Jacob was the one who really deserved the blessings, and was, no doubt, relieved that he had been prevented from making a terrible mistake. He now willingly confirmed what he had earlier been fooled into doing: *“indeed, he will be blessed.”*

It is so easy sometimes to cut corners when it comes to theft. “So what if I have the body shop pad the bill a bit for my insurance claim; the insurance company has plenty of money!” “Yes, I used the appliance in a way that voids the warranty and now it’s broken. The company doesn’t know!” “It’s okay if I ‘borrow’ stamps, staples, reams of paper, etc. from my office. After all, I’m a valued employee! (Or at least you’ll be a valued employee until they catch you pilfering stuff from the office!!)

There is no justification for theft. You can’t say, “It doesn’t make a difference.” To Isaac it made all the difference in the world. Esau took something that wasn’t his and brought it to his father. The dreadful stench of Gehinnom followed him in. Jacob brought something that was acquired legitimately. The magnificent scent of Paradise accompanied him.

Honesty smells Heavenly. Dishonesty provides a whiff of the other place. Which place would you rather smell like?

Have a great Shabbos.

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