

A Taste of Torah A Disguise in Blessing

By Rabbi Shachne Sommers

One of the more difficult stories in the Torah is the story of Yitzchak's blessing of Esav and Yaakov. Yitzchak, who was old and blind, summoned his eldest son Esav to receive his blessing before he died. Yaakov, directed by his mother Rivka, disguises himself as Esav and receives the blessings instead.

This story is troubling. These blessings played a significant role in the future history of the Jewish people. How could it be that the positive aspects of Jewish history are built on blessings that were really meant for someone else? Furthermore, how can we understand the actions of Rivka and Yaakov which, to say the least, seem to be less than perfectly honest?

These issues require careful study and are indeed explored in-depth by the commentators. Here, we will limit ourselves to one striking point made by Rabbi Isaac Sher, Rosh Yeshiva of the pre-WWII Slabodka Yeshiva.

Rabbi Sher draws a parallel to another story of a Patriarch's final blessings. Yaakov himself, before he died, was preparing to bless his grandchildren, Menashe and Efrayim. Rashi, quoting a Midrash, tells us that Yaakov was about to bless them, but the Divine presence suddenly left him, so he stopped. This was because certain wicked people would descend from Menashe and Efrayim,

making them unfit for blessing. It was only through extra prayer by Yosef that the Divine Presence returned to Yaakov, and he proceeded to bless them.

From this narrative, we learn two crucial points regarding the Patriarchs' blessings. Firstly, the Patriarch would only bless if the Divine Presence was there. Secondly, the Divine presence would leave if the person or his descendants was not fit to be blessed.

Applying these principles to Yitzchak's blessing leads to a startling conclusion: Esav could not possibly have received Yitzchak's blessing. If the Divine Presence left Yaakov because a few wicked people would descend from the righteous sons of Yosef, it is unthinkable that the Divine Presence would have remained to allow Yitzchak to bless the wicked Esav and his millions of wicked descendants.

Rivka knew this. Her motivation, says Rabbi Sher, was to protect Yitzchak from the trauma of losing the Divine Presence through a failed attempt at blessing Esav. Instead, the Divine Presence remained with Yitzchak, as Yaakov presented himself for the blessing.

Yaakov did not "take Esav's blessings". They could never have gone to Esav. They were meant for Yaakov, as evidenced by the Divine Presence which remained with Yitzchak as he pronounced the blessings.

Ask the Rabbi A Pointed Question

From: Binyomin S. Altman

Dear Rabbi,

There is a custom to remove a knife

from the table before Birkas Hamazon (Blessing after Meals). Does this include plastic knives?

Stories For The Soul

Letting it Get to Your Head

Yaakov is known for the midah of emes (quality of truth). He had many struggles throughout his life which molded him to be the perfect model of emes. Our struggles teach us much, as the following true story illustrates:

Baruch Cohen, Esq. became a lawyer after many years of post-high school yeshiva. Prior to his law school graduation, the dean called him with interesting news. An extremely prestigious law firm wanted to interview Baruch.

This was an amazing development. Baruch had not even sent a resume to that firm and while he was a good student from a good law school, the firm generally only hired graduates of Ivy League caliber schools.

Before Baruch left the dean's office, the dean offered him a piece of advice. "Baruch, I know you wore that religious skullcap all through law school, and you still wear it as a clerk in bankruptcy court. But wearing that skullcap to this interview could cost you the job."

Baruch was torn. He had worn the yarmulke all his life, suffering bloody noses and ridicule to keep it on. Although he had worried that a career in law could force it off his head, until this point the yarmulke had stayed in its place. But the prestige, the experience, and the six figure starting salary of the job beckoned to him.

The other Jewish lawyers he spoke to told him that it was not "done" to wear a yarmulke in court. He even spoke with a prominent Rabbi who said that it is permissible to go without a yarmulke to pursue a

Kollel Happenings

DIVIDED LOYALTIES AT NOV. 11 TORAH FOR FUTURE TYCOONS

Join Kollel Dean, Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab for "Divided Loyalties: Can you ever disclose private information?" at the next Torah for Future Tycoons, Mon., Nov. 11. The program will be held at noon in Room 305 of the Wolf Law Building at University of Colorado at Boulder. To RSVP, call 303-960-9369 or email dmitry.vilner@gmail.com



KOLLEL/WEST SIDE COMMUNITY SHABBATON NOV. 12-13

The Kollel and West Side community will host a Shabbaton on Shabbos Parshas Vayeitzei, Nov. 12-13. Guests will be hosted for Shabbos by Kollel families and other community members. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rye@denverkollel.org



LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THURS., NOV. 25

The next legal holiday learning program will take place on Thansgiving, Thurs., Nov. 25 at two locations. The Zera Avraham program is for men only and will start with Shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and a class from 9-10. \$125 sponsorship is still available. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rye@denverkollel.org. At Aish, men and women are invited to davening at 8:15 followed by breakfast and a debate at 9:15. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rmh@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Not Mere Child's Play - Part II

Adult children (over thirteen for a boy and twelve for a girl) who are not supported by their parents are the exclusive owners of their possessions. However, if the child is supported by the parents, there are halachic authorities

who say that gifts, wages, and profits received by the child belong to the parents.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

continued from front

Dear Binyomin,

There are two main reasons for removing the knife prior to Birkas Hamazon. One is based on the following incident: A person was once reciting Birkas Hamazon when he came to the third blessing, in which we ask Hashem to rebuild Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. He became so distraught at the thought of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, that he picked up the knife and stabbed himself.

The custom to remove the knife was patterned after this incident. Since it

occurred during the week, the custom applies only during the week, but not on Shabbos. In the same vein, the custom wouldn't apply to plastic knives, since plastic knives aren't 'lethal' in the classic sense.

Another reason for removing the knife: A table is compared to the Altar in the Holy Temple. Just as it is forbidden to use any iron utensil when hewing the stones for the Altar, so, too, we remove any metal knives prior to Birkas Hamazon.

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Stories for the Soul

continued from front

livelihood. Yes, he could remove his yarmulke, he thought - but did that mean he should?

After much soul searching, he finally decided that this was too big of an opportunity to jeopardize, so he went to his interview bare headed.

Nothing could have prepared him for the shock that awaited him. There in front of him sat the interviewer, clad in a yarmulke. The interviewer looked at Baruch and his uncovered head with equal shock and said, "Where is your yarmulke?"

The interviewer continued, "Do you know why you got this interview? I was in bankruptcy court and saw you clerking for the judge. It intrigued me that someone could have the conviction to proudly wear a yarmulke in court.

"Now you show up to this interview

without a yarmulke?! Now, when the opportunity presents itself, look at you. I am so deeply disappointed in you. You'll never make it in this firm - this is a firm of leaders, not followers. This interview is over."

Baruch was sent home reeling. He shed bitter tears because deep down he felt the interviewer was right.

He resolved from that point on that the argument of "this is how it is done" would never be one that would sway him. He never again removed his yarmulke for fear of what an employer, client, or jury might think. Today Baruch Cohen is a successful trial attorney, who has inspired many with the profound perspective that he acquired the hard way.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman