

Toldos - Rabbi Lerner - November 20, 2011

Whose Brachah Is It Anyway?

27:1: *And it came to pass when Yitzchak became old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he called Esav, his older son, and said to him. "My son." AND he said to him, "Her I am." And he said, "See, now, I have aged; I know not the day of my death. Now sharpen, if you please, your gear - your sword and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die."* Rivka panics, goes out to get Yaacov in order to have him receive the blessing using a masquerade.

This is a difficult story on many levels. First of all, what was going on in Yitzchak's mind that he wanted to give the brachah to Esav rather than Yaacov? It appears as though Yitzchak is making a critical mistake. Secondly, assuming that this is what his plan was, and he was blind and could not see, if he wanted to give the brachah to Esav instead of Yaacov, and now Yaacov takes his place because his mother forces him to do it, then it be very much what is called in halachik terminology a *Mekach Ta'us* - it is like a false transaction where he was misled - a transaction completed under false pretenses. Normally we say this type of a transaction is *bateyl* - it is worthless. It is analogous to our lemon law, where if a lemon of a car is sold to someone, he can get his money back when the true situation is revealed. A marriage also be annulled if there were some major issue that was hidden before the marriage and then revealed after the chupah. So what is the whole point of Yaacov getting the brachah this way instead of Esav - what does he gain? Why don't we just call it a *Brachah Ta'us*? And yet, after the subterfuge is discovered, the brachah does seem to take hold, and Yitzchak confirms that Yaacov will be blessed. So what is going on here? Thirdly, what is the whole point of the preparation of the food in order to get the brachah - why can't Yitzchak just put his hand on Esav and give him the brachah - why does he need all of the prep stuff to precede the brachah?

The commentators struggle to deal with this story, and they go from one extreme to the other - *min hakatzeh el hakatzeh* - to understand and explain the thinking of Yitzchak, to see if he was completely off base or if there was some basis for what he was planning, even though in the end his plan gets foiled. Some meforshim say he was totally wrong - and we know the Torah has no problems pointing out that the Avos were human and could make mistakes - just as the **Ramban** says that Avraham was terribly wrong and sinned when he went down to Egypt during the famine, that it was a lack of trust in Hashem. However, on the other extreme, others say Yitzchak was justified in what he planned.

The last two pasukim prior to Yitzchak's attempt to bless Esav detailed Esav's taking two local Chiti women as wives, and they were the source of great bitterness to his parents. They continued to worship idols in Yitzchak's house. When the Torah tells us that Yitzchak's vision was terribly compromised and he could no longer make out faces, **Rashi** says it might have been caused by the smoke from the incense these women offered as part of their idol worship. If Esav married these women, why would Yitzchak want to bless him?

Ba'al Haturim: Yitzchak became blind, as the pasuk in Shoftim says: "*Bribery will cause judges to be blind* [to proper justice]." The judge will feel indebted to the one offering the bribe. But according to this pasuk, God will actually physically blind the judge as a punishment for his taking a bribe. In a like fashion, Yitzchak was blinded by the delicacies that Esav the hunter provided for his father. That is why Yitzchak asks Esav to now prepare these delicacies

for him. He was blind mentally and God made him physically blind. **Rabbeinu Bachya**: agrees and says because Yitzchak took bribes from Esav, God blinded him. This is a huge indictment of Yitzchak, that he went blind because of this serious weakness.

Sforno: We see this again with Eli, the Kohain Gadol who had children who went off the derech, who also went "blind." Why was Eli blinded? Because he had the same problem with his children - he didn't protest against his sons' wrongdoing. They should have been very ethical people in their high position, but they were evil, and were taking bribes from people and doing unethical things; the meforshim tell us that when you have a child who goes off the derech and you don't discipline him, then the punishment is that Hashem blinds you. In the case of Yitzchak it was physical, Eli spiritual.

Chasam Sofer: Yitzchak is a person who was trying to learn more and more, and he encountered something disturbing at this stage of his life, something much earlier than he should have since he had not reached the time of his death or old age - he realized that he doesn't have the usual clarity in his learning; he couldn't penetrate the mysteries of Torah; he no longer had the Ruach Hakodesh to help him plumb the depths. He felt he was being punished because he had not properly taught Esav. He felt that Hashem was causing him to lose his divine inspiration - he felt he was being punished for the sins of his child. We see this from Sefer Zechariah as well, when Yehoshuah, the Kohein Gadol, was dressed in "disgusting garments" - it doesn't mean it literally - it was the time of Ezra Hasofer, when many of the Kohanim had completely assimilated, whose children had intermarried, as did Yehoshuah - so it was like his inner garments were "full of shmutz," and he was blocked from receiving Ruach Hakodesh. This is what we see with Yitzchak - he was blind because of his son, and now he wanted to bless him. In order to proceed, he told Esav to go out into the forest to catch game - he wasn't hungry; he was trying to give his son some zechus, some merit, in terms of the mitzvah of *kibud av va'eym*. It would not only help Esav get back onto the derech, but it would also help Yitzchak remove the spiritual stain of having a "stained" child, and enable him to again receive ruach hakodesh. So we see from here that Yitzchak understood the nature of the problem and began to move in the proper direction.

Or Hachayim: Yitzchak wanted to bless Esav the Rashah, because he thought that the very blessings given will be the inspiration, the wake-up call, for Esav to come back to Torah. Tzadikim are in tremendous pain when their children are not acting properly; Yitzchak was trying desperately to get Esav to do teshuva - it was all Kiruv to get Esav to come back to the right path. We see the proof of this when Yaacov was punished with Dina's kidnapping because he hid her in a box so that Esav would not see her and want to marry her. The chachamim say that Yaacov was punished for the failure to perhaps have suggested this shiduch that might have turned Esav around and changed all of history forever by turning him into a tzadik. Yitzchak was going all out to try to save Esav, even by giving him this brachah.

What was the nature of the brachah that Yitzchak wanted to give Esav? **Ramban**: it was in his mind to give Esav the complete brachah of Avraham, that he would be the father of the chosen people and he would inherit the holy land - it was the whole kit and caboodle. He is the bechor and it is coming to him. This was Yitzchak's intention.

Ramban: Is this what God wanted? How could Yitzchak have wanted to do this? Didn't Hashem reveal to Rivka that the younger would serve the elder? Have we forgotten Rivka's pregnancy when she was told at the Yeshivas Shem Ve'Eyver that at the end, the elder would serve the younger - she knew without a doubt that Yaacov was the tzadik. Why was Yitzchak going against God's wishes? We must conclude that Rivka never told Yitzchak the prophecy, for

had she told him, he would never have gone against the word of God. She might not have told him for modesty reasons, because when she went to the Yeshiva in a depressed state due to her great pain, she did not ask Yitzchak for permission to go an outside source. Or she might have felt that she did not need to tell Yitzchak who was a greater tzadik and Navi than those in the yeshiva, and he must have known the prophecy; she was embarrassed to say anything. But he did not know, and now, years later, it was too late to tell him. Knowing the children and the prophecy, she thought that Yitzchak either will bless Yaacov or he would not give any blessing at all. She was completely caught off guard when he decided to bless Esav. She could not just do nothing and let things go along without intervening; she could not just leave it all in God's hands.

Abarbanel: why didn't Yitzchak do the same thing that Avraham did, when he had to choose between his children, and he did not want to - he ultimately left it in God's hands? There it was different, as Avraham did not have to choose - when Hashem promised Avraham a child with Sarah, he responded that if only Yishmael would live before God; Hashem answered that Yishmael will also be a great nation, but through Yitzchak will the brachah continue. God already made the choice for Avraham; there was no reason for Avraham to tell this to Yitzchak. Yitzchak was not given this guidance from Hashem, and he now thought he had to make the choice; Rivka could not stand by doing nothing. All the meforshim agree that she never told Yitzchak, otherwise the story would have been incomprehensible.

The **Ramban** says that Yitzchak was going to give the brachah of Avraham to Esav. This presents great difficulty. At the end of the parsha, when Yitzchak and Rivka decide to send Yaacov away to Padan Aram to find a wife, Yitzchak says that Hashem should bless Yaacov and give him the blessing of Avraham to inherit this land. This is the brachah of Avraham - then what was the brachah that Yitzchak was going to give to Esav? This would seem to be a different brachah. Therefore, many meforshim say that it was never the intention to give the brachah of Avraham to Esav; he knew that Esav was not worthy of the spiritual brachah; that brachah came much later on.

If he was going to give the brachos under false intentions - how can this work if it is a *Mechach Ta'us*? **Abarbanel:** there are three different kinds of brachos: 1) God can bless man directly. 2) Then there are blessings that we give to God. 3) Finally, there are brachos that humans give to humans. The first type are real blessings that God gives out and clearly come true. He has all of the power in the world and can bless whomever He wishes. The second type are brachos of shevach, hoda'ah, or bakashah to God - we thank him or ask for more things for us. We cannot bring blessings to God, but we can praise Him and ask things of Him. But what about the third type - we are not praising the person; we do not have the powers to effect a blessing on someone? How can a human bless another human and expect it to come true? It doesn't mean we have the power and can make it happen - we are invoking our zechus and pray to God to have this blessing come true. We don't have the power to dispense brachos, but we have the power to use our merit to pray to Hashem to plant the seed for this brachah to take hold; but it is up to God to bring it about. Similarly, the Kohanim are the instruments for God to bring brachos to the people they bless daily; they don't confer the blessings themselves. This is what was going on in this situation: it is comparable to planting seeds that we want to germinate; if the planter makes a mistake and plants barley instead of wheat in the field - what is going to happen is that nature takes hold and barley will grow. Yitzchak wanted to plant the seeds in Esav, but because of Rivka's trickery, the seeds are planted in Yaacov, and Hashem clearly sides with Rivka knowing that the younger one is to be the ruler - the seed will germinate even though it is given by mistake; once it is planted it is planted, and Hashem wanted it to go there and it will

succeed. How do we see this everyday? Kohanim bless people everyday - they say that Hashem should do all of these wonderful things to those being blessed; they are the conduit for the brachos to be directed down to us, but it is Hashem who does all of the blessings. Here too it comes from Hashem through the hands of Yitzchak who is the means for channeling it, and it ends up just where Hashem wanted it to go. Brachos involve God, and Hashem uses humans to funnel it down to others; Rivka understood this and that is why she intervened this way.

Rav Hirsch: what was going on in Rivka's mind? The deception will ultimately be revealed when Esav returns; she knew this would happen - it was unavoidable that it would all blow up. What was her intention by playing out this comedy? She *wanted* it to be discovered that it was a ruse. She wanted to bring home to Yitzchak how easily he could be deceived, how easily he can be duped by an Esav - if an Ish Tam like Yaacov could masquerade as a Gibor Tzayad, how much more easily it is for a Gibor Tzayad to masquerade as an Ish Tam. If Yaacov could so easily deceive his father, then imagine how easily it has been for the cunning Esav to pull off a lifelong deception. And this way Rivka succeeded perfectly - she completely convinced him how gullible he was, how easy it was to deceive him. That is the meaning of the pasuk that says Yitzchak trembled greatly. He now realized that he had been taken in all of these years, and now Yitzchak confirmed that indeed, Yaacov will be blessed.

Other commentaries say the complete opposite, that Yitzchak was not taken in; he was very unhappy about Esav's wives and behavior, and he knew what Esav was like. He never had the idea of making Esav the third of the Avos. There was no question that Yaacov would get birkas Avraham and the land of Israel. The religious brachah was always to go to Yaacov.

What was the brachah that Yitzchak had in mind for Esav? It was the brachah of Gashmius, the dew of the heavens, the fat of the land, power and materialism, tremendous physical wealth; it was nothing about holiness. It was all Olam Hazeih - all physical things. Yitzchak thought that he had two sons moving in different directions. Yaacov will be involved with the spiritual world; he will study Torah and connect to the heavens more than the earth. The physical blessings of gashmius would go to Esav, while the spiritual blessings would go to Yaacov. He wasn't blind to his children - he knew that the physical world was not in sync with the spiritual world and holiness - let that world go into the hands of Esav. It therefore makes sense that Rivka probably did discuss all of this with Yitzchak, but he felt that if Yaacov got these brachos, he would be too involved with the outside, physical world and would have contempt for holiness. Rivka, however, was convinced that Yaacov should get both blessings.

Beis Halevi: she agreed with Yitzchak, that it would be dangerous for Yaacov to get all of the gashmius brachos. But if Yaacov owns the physical world and Esav enjoys the entire physical world, he is plundering it from us. Really it's ours by our getting the brachah. If Esav is stealing it, it accrues to our merit; it is ours but we don't have full control over it because he stole it. We don't have the power and wealth because it was stolen from us, but we get the merit of it.

Malbim: (with endorsement by the **Rav**): the greatness of Judaism is to harness the beauty of both worlds; to recognize what is primary and what is secondary; to place the world of physicality and wealth and put it to work for the world of holiness. Just because one is religious, contact with the outside world will not corrupt him. We can balance the world of holiness with the wealth that God has given us, and use that world to strengthen our holiness, and increase the realm of Torah. There were many examples of this - Rav Elazar Ben Azaryah was very wealthy and he achieved greatness in the world of Torah, sustaining so many others and becoming head of the Sanhedrin at age 17. Wealth will not harm us - it is to serve the world of holiness and they

should not be in competition with each other. Power and wealth do not have to corrupt. Yitzchak wanted to take it away from Yaacov to prevent his corruption; Rivka wanted us to get both, and from what we see in the remainder of the Torah, it is what Hashem wanted as well. The **Ray**: Hashem blesses and sanctifies the seventh day of the week - what is the difference between them? Brachah is means, Kedushah is ends. All that is done for six days allows the enjoyment in the seventh day. The six days are the means, and it leads to the kedushah of the seventh day. This is what Rivka was trying to convince Yitzchak - she had to use a trick to accomplish this, Hashem agreed, and ultimately at the end of the story, Yitzchak agreed and said that indeed, Yaacov will be blessed with this brachah of gashmius.