

Parshas Toldos

For the week ending 2 Kislev 5756
24 & 25 November 1995

Summary

After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak's prayers to Hashem are answered and Rivka conceives twins, Esav and Yaakov. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born first, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. As they grow up, the contrast between the twins becomes apparent: Esav is a hunter, a man of the field, of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of the funeral of their grandfather Avraham, Yaakov is cooking lentil soup, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn. Yitzchak tries to escape to Egypt when a famine strikes Canaan, but Hashem reminds him that because of the *Akeida* (where he was offered up as a sacrifice) he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. Instead he relocates to *Gerar* in the land of the *Plishtim*, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say that she is his sister. Yitzchak arouses jealousy when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three *Batei Mikdash* (Temples) which will be built in the future. Avimelech, seeing the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on Yitzchak, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses the end of his days approaching, he summons Esav to give Esav his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate his brother and receive the blessings. When Esav in a rage of frustration complains to his father that his brother has bought his birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov who has valued its responsibilities rather than its privileges, and confirms the blessings he has given. Esav vows to kill his brother, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

The clothing of HIDE
can no longer HIDE
the VOICE.

Commentaries

THE VOICE

“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav” (26:22).

The Voice is given to Yaakov. And the Hands, to Esav. The internal power which emanates from the heart — that's the Voice. The external power of action — the Hands. But these Hands are not satisfied just to dominate the physical world. They strive constantly to subjugate the Voice. The Hands of Esav thrust themselves into the insides of Yaakov; coarse Hands delving into the depths of the *neshama*; setting up an idol in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish soul. Superficiality swelling up and suffusing the innermost chambers of the heart. The Hands strangling the Voice; The Voice of prayer without the feeling of the heart; A mitzvah done mechanically — the Hands are working. And the Voice grows quieter and quieter... But in spite of this, the Voice is *the voice of Yaakov*, destined to rise up, to

dominate and elevate the Hands, to purify them and make them holy. When Yitzchak said that the voice was “*the voice of Yaakov and the hands were the hands of Esav*,” he thought that it was Esav who was in front of him, and that Esav had acquired the voice of Yaakov — that the Voice had sanctified and elevated Esav. The truth of the matter was that Esav had remained unchanged in his evil, while it was Yaakov who stood before him, garbed in the goatskin hides of Esav. For the Voice — the voice of Yaakov — permeates to the outermost layer of its skin, even to the very end of the material world.

(Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin -
L'Torah U'L'Moadim)

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