

Shabbat Shalom

In this week's parasha we discuss the story of two brothers; Esav and Yaacov, and their parents Rivkah and Isaac.

Rivkah gives birth to two boys. The first baby comes out red-cheeked (Adom) and hairy and they name him Esav. The second son is fair skinned and gentle looking. They name him Yacov. The boys grow up alongside one another, but they grow up very differently. Esav is a hunter and a farmer and knows how to live off the land. Yacov is a calm and a thoughtful shepherd. Strangely, each parent has their favorite son. Isaac favors Esav, Rivkah favors Yacov.

One day Esav comes home from a long day in the woods feeling hungry and tired and he sees Yacov with a pot of stew. Esav asks his brother for some of his stew. Yacov jumps on the opportunity to help his brother, but not without receiving something in return and Yacov suggests trading the lentil stew for Esav's birthright. Esav, the practical minded brother, realizes that a birthright is of no use to him if he is first to die of hunger.

Years pass and their father, Isaac, becomes old, blind, and nearing death and he calls Esav into his room and says "My son. Go hunt some deer for me and make the extraordinary dish that I love. Bring it to me and I will eat it and then I will bless you before I die."

Rivkah overhears this conversation between Esav and Isaac and tells Yacov what she had heard. Rivkah tells Yaacov to impersonate Esav and to trick his father into receiving Esav's blessing and birthright.

When Esav realizes that he's been deceived by his own brother, he cries out with an exceedingly loud and bitter cry. Esav immediately grows a deep hatred for his brother and vows to kill him.

Why would Esav trade his birthright for food? Because Esav is a practical being, as we all are. We see practicality today in what we buy and how we spend our time. What good is a birthright that you can't touch or feel or eat? There's nothing practical about a birthright. Perhaps most of us would probably have done the same as Esav. We want the "here and now." So God recognizes that we all have a bit of Esav within us that maintains a tendency towards practicality and materialism, and perhaps God recognizes that this human attribute can't always be punished. Therefore it's important that we hear Esav's cries and remember and pity him.

This parasha is also about decision making and choices. Esav could have chosen to pursue his father's wishes and to carry on the family name, but he chose to take the easier path, as most of us often do. Nevertheless the Talmud sees value in Esav's tears

ואית דאמרי משמיה דרבי שמלאי, רבי אמר

אמרו ישראל לפני הקב"ה: רבש"ע, בזכות שלש דמעות שהוריד עשו מעיניו, השלטנו מסוף העולם ועד סופו, ונתת לנו שלום בעולם הזה,

Rabbi sim-la-ee states: The jewish people said in front of the master of the universe. Through the merit of 3 tears that fell from Esav's eyes he controlled from one end of the world to the other and GOD gave him peace in this world.

This midrash refers to the roman period which is often referred to as the Pax Romana or the Roman peace. Rome was so powerful that no one wanted to challenge them and it was peaceful as a result. The rabbi who wrote this lived during the roman period and he wanted to explain why God granted them so much power. Esav came out of the womb and was referred to as the admoni; meaning red. The rabbis understood edom to represent rome.

As mentioned earlier, Esav did not care at all about his birthright or the family legacy until it was actually taken away from him. Esav asked his father do you have one more blessing for me? And God rewarded Esav with a second blessing for caring so deeply, even though it was far too late to recover his birthright. It is important to note that we can't ignore Esav's cries and only celebrate Jacobs triumph. It is also important for the jewish people to know that Esav's last minute interest in his ancestry was rewarded by God.

It is interesting that what Esav missed so dearly from his father was just a Bracha, only a blessing. What exactly is a blessing?

Rabbi Soloveitchick teaches that a blessing is not "a thank you" but an opportunity to take something that has potential and make it into something real. For example, if you are given a loaf of bread, that loaf of bread provides you with energy. You could use that energy to exercise and grow stronger and healthier, and that strength could be used to create something good and meaningful. Or on the other hand, you could choose to simply consume that loaf of bread and do nothing with the energy that it provides. You could choose to then spend the day lazily sitting around the home while allowing for that loaf of bread to slow you down and make you fat and unhealthy. That same energy could be used for doing mitzvot, helping other people, studying Torah, or it could be used for less important activities like playing video games, beating up your brother, or getting into trouble. The opportunity to do good is always within our grasp and it is our decision as to whether we use that energy, or the bracha, properly; or squander it. The Bracha reminds us that it is our responsibility and our opportunity to make the best of a situation.

One part of this blessing is ועל חרבך תחיה which means "you shall live by the sword." This means that Esav was very skilled with weapons. He could choose to use these talents as a highway robber, or an assassin. Instead Yitzchak emphasizes to his son that the "Sword" should be used for good, not for bad; for life, and not for death. "My bracha to you, Esav, is that your powers should also be directed to the good" says the elder Yitzchak. The famous spanish Commentator Don Yitzchak Abarbanel says that this is meant to teach us that Esav did make the choice to use the sword for good. The pax romana was actually a peace inspired by the power of the sword.

I was very fortunate to have celebrated becoming a Bar Mitzvah in Israel, just a couple months ago, as well as here today in Vancouver. In Israel, I was surrounded by my amazing family that has a very rich tradition and legacy, one that I aim to propel into future generations. For example my Saba Tony, along with his sisters and Savta Marcel and Saba David escaped from Iraq, where Jews were being killed and imprisoned, to ensure the continuation of our family. My Savta Ruti's committed her career to teaching Hebrew and Judaics, so as to ensure the continuation of our traditions. Her parents, "Oma and Opa" fled from Nazi Germany, leaving behind everything just to stay alive and again --to ensure the continuation of our family. My Saba Jimmy and Savta Haia make sure that אני מתאמן בעברית ויודע לשון הקודש --that i speak Hebrew and that I understand where I came from and that Israel remains as an important part of my life. They value Jewish Tradition, and our homeland of Israel --thereby enforcing the continuation of our family. Sometimes I take it for granted and I forget how lucky I am to always have a saba and savta and a saba and savta to be with for shabbat and the chagim. My Saba Shaul and Savta Ilana escaped World War II labor camps, introduced me to zionism and taught me to love Yerushalayim and always emphasized the importance of history, torah, and tradition. And Although I never meet my Saba David and Savta Rena I know that they too escaped persecution to make a better life for themselves in Israel and to ensure the continuation of our jewish traditions. All of this contributes to who I am today and I hope to grow up and continue these values so that i can make everyone who has celebrated with me today proud. . It's kind of like that loaf of bread that I discussed earlier. You have to do something with the opportunity given to you. Having my family and friends celebrating for me today is my Bracha and I need to make that Bracha, that opportunity, into a prosperous reality which I also hope to pass down through the generations to come just as they have done for me.

I would like to thank all my family from Seattle (Saba, Savta, Ravit, Russ, Tal, Melissa, Mayan & Ben and all my cousins --OK I'll name them all in one breath; Noam, Ami, Geffen, Saggi, Gali, and Eelan) for making the long journey to this far away and foreign country. I'd also like to thank Dod Michah, Rami, and Ori for coming all the way from California to celebrate with me, as well as our good friends from Portland and Chana & Pinchas from Toronto. I also want to thank my entire Vancouver family and all of our friends for coming to celebrate with me today.

I would especially like to thank Rabbi Tzvi Goldman. I can confidently say that Rabbi Goldman is the greatest Bar Mitzvah trainer. He spent all of his spare time helping me prepare for my parasha and for my haftarah --not once, but twice since i had to read a completely different parasha in Israel. He's a master and i feel very lucky to have studied with him. Thank you Rabbi.

And a big thank you as well to Rabbi Rosenblatt who worked with me for weeks to help me prepare for my dvar torah --thank you Rabbi!

Believe it or not, preparing for a Bar Mitzvah is a very enjoyable process (which sometimes you don't truly appreciate until that process is over). And i can tell that my Ima is already excited to start it all over again for Amit in a couple of years. she's particularly fond of all the details and preparations that go into the bar mitzvah planning (not at all). It's been a very tricky year for my

ima and aba trying to juggle us 4 kids and sometimes we perhaps didn't make it all that easy for them --right Amit, Ziv? (Itay, you were an angel). So, thank you Ima and Aba; and thank you Amit and Ziv and Itay for all your encouragement and love. Oh and one more thing happy birthday to my cousin Liam, my uncle David and my aunt Melissa! Oh and you too Amit!

shabbat Shalom!