

Parashat Toldot, 5780, 2019:

*Encountering Eisav*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

In many ways, Parashat Toldot can be thought of as “the *parasha* of *brachot*,” since both Ya’akov and Eisav received blessings from their father Yitzchak. While Ya’akov’s first blessing was initially designed and designated for Eisav, his second one was specifically formulated for him. In contrast, Eisav received only one *bracha*. Yet, on a certain level we can readily ask, “Why was Eisav given a *bracha* at all?” After all, juxtaposed to Yitzchak’s announcement to Eisav that he was prepared to give him his blessing, the Torah informs us that Eisav married two Hittite women, Yehudit bat B’ari and Bashmat bat Alon. These women were a complete “vexation of the spirit to Yitzchak and to Rivka” since, as Rashi (1040-1105) explains, “they worshipped idols.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 26:35, Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

A number of *meforshim* (Torah commentators) wrestled with our question and gave a variety of answers. In my estimation, Rabbi Chayim ben Moshe ibn Attar (1696-1743) offers one of the clearest responses:

The reason why Yitzchak desired to bestow a *bracha* upon the evil Eisav was because he thought that as a result of the many blessings contained therein, he would alter his behavior and acquire positive ethical characteristics and, thereby, improve his actions. This is the case, since the *tzaddikim* suffer greatly when their children act in an evil manner; as such, he [Yitzchak] tried to bring him [Eisav] to improve his ways. In addition, it is entirely possible that this could have succeeded, for as our sages teach us, Ya’akov was punished for withholding Dinah from Eisav, since she would have had the ability to bring him back to all that is good... (*Sefer Ohr HaChayim*, Parashat Bereishit 27:1, translation my own)

In sum, according to Rav Attar, Yitzchak sought to bless Eisav for two reasons: To alleviate his own pain and suffering, and to help his eldest son do *teshuvah* and return to the path of proper behavior. Unfortunately, neither of these potentialities were achieved, and Eisav's anti-Semitic descendants ceaselessly plague us today. As Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai so poignantly taught us: "It is a well-known fact that Eisav hates Jacob..." (*Sifrei Bamidbar* 69)

In 1732, the British poet, Alexander Pope, coined the now proverbial phrase, "Hope springs eternal..." (*An Essay on Man*) While this is true for humankind in general, it is particularly true for the Jewish people. We steadfastly hope for a nobler and gentler tomorrow wherein all people will recognize the truth of Hashem's existence, accept His kingship, turn toward Him, reject false idols and stand shoulder to shoulder to create an equitable world for one and all. In short, as we recite in the second paragraph of the *Aleinu*:

And so, we **hope** in You, Hashem our G-d, to soon see Your splendor when You will sweep idolatry away so that false gods will be utterly destroyed and You will perfect the world through Your kingship. Then, all humanity will invoke Your name, and all the evil ones of the earth will turn unto You. Then all who live will know that unto You every knee must bend, every tongue pledge loyalty. May all bow in worship to You, Hashem. May they give honor to Your glory; may everyone accept Your dominion. Reign over all, soon and for all time. Kingship is Yours in glory, now and forever. As it is written in Your Torah: "Hashem reigns for ever and ever." And so, too, does it state: "And Hashem will become King over all the earth; on that day Hashem will be one, and His name one." (Translation, Sefaria.org with my extensive emendations)

With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may we witness the realization of Zechariah's stirring words soon and in our time: "And Hashem will become King over all the earth; on that day Hashem will be one, and His name one." (14:9) *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.