

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## **ESAU'S HATRED - DISTANCING ONESELF FROM A WICKED NEIGHBOR**

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

**R**egarding the Torah's account of Esau's request for a blessing from his father, we should really be a little surprised. The passage in question reads as follows: "And he also made delicacies, and brought them to his father. And he said to his father, 'Let my father arise and eat of the venison of his son....' And Isaac his father said to him, 'Who are you?' And he said, 'I am your son, your firstborn, Esau'" (Gen 27:32-32).

How is it that Isaac didn't recognize the voice of Esau, his eldest son, that he had to ask him, "Who are you?" We must ask ourselves how Esau dared to present himself as the firstborn, since he had sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen 25:33) and despised this right (v.34), something that surely didn't escape his father's attention.

We must also ask why Isaac told Esau, "Your brother came with deceit and took your blessing" (Gen 27:35). Isaac should have kept silent and not strengthen the hate among brothers. In effect, Esau's hate for Jacob became fixed after this incident: "It is a law: Esau hates Jacob" (Sifrei Numbers

9:10). It is a hate that we still suffer from today. For what reason then did Isaac, by his words, create such a situation?

If someone feels remorse over his sins and wants to repent, yet doesn't give his all to follow through on this realization and correct his sins, he definitely loses the image of G-d that is in him, and his behavior becomes ever more distorted.

It is possible to suppose that Isaac saw Esau return from the hunt and prepare him something to eat. However, here the Torah doesn't specify that he prepared a meal "as his father loved", which indicates that he sought to deceive his father, making him think that he had repented, which was clearly not the case. By deceiving himself and his father, he damaged his soul to the extent that it was no longer recognizable, to the extent that even his father asked him, "Who are you?" And when he replied, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau," he wanted to say: "I wish to take back my birthright, for I have repented of my scheming with all heart." In hearing this, "Isaac trembled with an exceedingly great trembling" (Gen 27:33), for "he saw hell open beneath his feet" (Bereshith Rabba 65:22; 67:1). The Sages tell us that "wicked men, even at the threshold

of hell, don't regret their actions" (Eruvin 19a).

Isaac understood that there would never be peace between the two brothers, and so he preferred to separate them immediately. He asked, "Who, then, is he that hunted venison and brought it to me...?" (Gen 27:33). The word מי ("who") has a numerical value of 50, and alludes to the 40 days of the giving of the Torah and the 10 Commandments that were given only to Israel. "This word designates the one who will later receive the Torah, which was given in 40 days" (Menachot 99b), and who accepted the 10 Commandments with love and fear. "This one preceded you and brought me game – the practice of the commandments and good deeds – and I tasted the taste of the Garden of Eden and blessed him. And so 'also blessed is he' [Gen 27:33]. I will not take back my blessings; they are transmitted to him as an unalienable gift."

From the beginning of this incident until that moment, Isaac didn't once mention Jacob's name. The Emek Davar states that Isaac had not yet revealed to Esau that it was Jacob, for that

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## *Esau's hatred - distancing oneself from a wicked neighbor (continuation from page 1)*

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

would have constituted gossip. He had always hoped, and perhaps hoped even then, that Esau would truly wish to repent and accept that the blessings belonged to “he that hunted game”. Yet Isaac could discern that his words had no effect at all on Esau (the characteristic of wicked men is to remain attached to their wickedness; even at the threshold of hell they don't withdraw). When “Esau lifted up his voice and wept” (Gen 27:38), it was not because he had lost his chance at eternal life, but rather because he had lost the pleasures of this world. And so Isaac revealed the reason behind his thinking: It was not right that these two brothers should live together. On the contrary, it was right that hate and profound animosity should separate them for always, a hate so great that it wouldn't disappear or weaken even after many years. All this was in order that Jacob and his descendants not be influenced by Esau and his descendants. And so Isaac openly told him, “Your brother came with deceit and took your blessing” (v.35). He told him that it was Jacob who did it, thus putting an end to their fraternal love for thousands of future generations, and so forever separated the wicked from the righteous.

Prior to this, Esau had thought that, from then on, Jacob would be dependent on him for material possessions, and that he would serve him always. But then he heard from the mouth of his own father that Jacob didn't only receive the world to come, but also “your blessing” – success in this world! In addition, since Isaac told Esau, “Behold, a lord have I made him to you” (v.37), and since “everything that a slave owns belongs to his master” (Bereshith Rabba 67:5), Jacob would therefore rule!

This greatly irritated Esau. If Jacob were to inherit both worlds (“he has supplanted me these two times”), what could Esau then do? He insisted that his father bless him as well: “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” (v.36). In response, Isaac promised him that “when you strive, you shall break off his yoke from upon your neck” (v.40), but that “as long as Israel is tied to the

Torah, he will not end up in hell” (Shemot Rabba 51:8), and “as long as Israel obeys G-d's will, no foreign nation can dominate him” (Ketubot 66b; Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 34:4). Yet, he continued, “if you see your brother freeing himself from the yolk of the Torah, you can declare war on him and win” (Bereshith Rabba 67:7), and so “you can free yourself from his yolk.”

This shows us that only the yolk of the Torah – its practice and study – protects Jacob and his descendants and prevents them from the influence of Esau. As our Sages say, “When the voice of Jacob makes itself heard in the houses of prayer and study, the hands of Esau do not dominate him” (Bereshith Rabba 65:20). If they unfortunately abandon the Torah, Esau will free himself from the yolk of his brother and will continue to cause, as he normally does, Israel to suffer. As the Sages say, “in every age, Amalek serves as a whip for Israel” (Bereshith Rabba 19: 11) – they strike him until he sincerely repents of his sins.

Such is perpetually the relationship between Jacob and Esau, be they his slaves or be they his rulers. This is what the Sages have said, namely, “If someone tells you that Jerusalem and Rome are both destroyed, don't believe him; that both are prosperous, don't believe him; that one is destroyed and the other is prosperous, you may believe him, for it is written, ‘I will be filled, for she was destroyed’ [Eze 26:2]. When one of them is filled, the other is destroyed, as it is written, ‘and one people shall be stronger than the other people’ [Gen 25:23]” (Megillah 6a).

We see, therefore, that Isaac bestowed a great blessing on his children by inciting this deep hate for Jacob in Esau's heart. This was in order that they separate from one another, and that the children of Jacob learn not the wicked ways of Esau. This is how Isaac kept watch over Jacob and his descendants for all time.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

### Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai

To get an idea of the greatness of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, one needs only to read the following narrative, brought by the Sages:

Having fallen gravely ill, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai's students came to visit him, and in seeing them he began to cry. His students asked, "Our master, the light and pillar of Israel, why are you crying?"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai replied, "If I were being preparing to come before a king of flesh and blood, a king who is today in the world and tomorrow in the grave, I know that if this king were angry with me, his anger would not be forever. If he were to imprison me, the imprisonment ordered by him would not last forever. If he were to put me to death, the death ordered by him would not be eternal. I would appease him with words and bribe him with money. Nevertheless, I would still cry. Now, today, I am being brought before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He. He lives forever, and His anger, if He were to turn it against me, would be final. If He were to imprison me, this imprisonment would be forever; if He would put me to death, this death would be eternal. I will not be able to appease Him with words or bribe Him with money. And not only that, but there are two paths that lie before me – one for Gan Eden and the other for Gehinnom – and I don't know by which path they will make me go. And yet you don't want me to cry?"

His students said, "Our Master, bless us!"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai replied, "May G-d grant that your fear of Heaven equal your fear of beings of flesh and blood!"

Surprised by this response, the students asked him, "That's all? Nothing more?"

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai said to them, "If only you reach that level. Know this: When a man commits a sin, he tells himself, 'I hope no one saw me!'"

A few moments before dying, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai told his students the following: "Remove all impurity from the vessels in the house, and prepare a throne for Hezekiah, King of Judah, who is about to arrive."

## Eishet Chayil

### Grace After Meals and other Blessings

- Women are obligated to wash their hands (*Netilat Yadayim*) before a meal. If they want to eat only a *Kezayit* of bread (approximately 30 grams), they should wash their hands without saying the blessing of *Al Netilat Yadayim*. If they want to eat a *kebeitzah* (which is to say, approximately 56 grams), they should wash their hands and recite the blessing. They should perform the *Netilah* correctly and accustom young girls to do so from childhood.

- For *Netilat Yadayim*, nail polish does not constitute a *Chatzitzah*, nor does the henna that certain individuals have the custom of putting on their hands at a wedding. However, a ring set with a stone does constitute a *Chatzitzah*.

- According to Halachah, women are obligated to wash their hands after a meal (*Mayim Acharonim*), just like men, and it is advisable that women and young girls be accustomed to do so.

- A woman cannot join two men to perform *Zimun* when she has eaten with them. However, she should respond when she has heard the *Zimun* of three men. Similarly, a woman cannot join with men to complete a *Minyan* (a group of ten men), in order to recite *Zimun* with mention of G-d's name.

- When three women have eaten together, they may perform *Zimun*, but without mentioning G-d's name. Nevertheless, certain authorities believe that women should never perform *Zimun*.

- A woman may exempt a child from reciting *Birkat Hamazon* by reciting it herself. This is in order that the child becomes accustomed to the mitzvah, the obligation for the child being but a rabbinic injunction (*Me'd'Rabbanan*).

- Women are obligated to recite *Birkat Hamazon* when they have eaten a *Kezayit* of bread (approximately 30 grams). They should recite all the blessings and mention the covenant (*Brit*) and the Torah. They should not recite an abbreviated text of the *Birkat Hamazon*; they should recite it entirely.

- Women cannot discharge a man from his obligation to recite *Birkat Hamazon* when he has eaten and is satisfied, since in such a case his obligation stems from the Torah.

- A woman who has eaten to satiety can discharge a man from his obligation if he has not eaten a *Kezayit*, or if he has not eaten to satiety. However if she has not eaten to satisfaction, she cannot discharge a man from his obligation to recite *Birkat Hamazon* if he has not eaten a *Kezayit*.

- A woman who has eaten to satiety cannot exempt herself from her obligation to recite *Birkat Hamazon* by listening to a child recite it if he has not yet reached the age of Bar Mitzvah. She cannot do so even if this child has eaten a sufficient quantity to be satisfied, for her obligation stems from the Torah, and one cannot exempt oneself from a Torah obligation by a rabbinic injunction.

- Women should recite *Birkat Hamazon* while sitting. They cannot recite it while clearing the table.

- A father is obligated to teach his daughters how to recite *Birkat Hamazon*, in the same way that he is obligated to teach his children all the mitzvot. We respond by saying "amen" to the blessings of a young girl who is old enough to be taught and understands to Whom prayers are addressed.

- As long as a child doesn't know how to recite the blessings alone, the child's mother can pronounce G-d's name in order to teach them.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### *The secret of Esau: Edom power (A teaching of the Maggid of dubno)*

“And you shall serve your brother, and it shall come to pass that when you strive, you shall break off his yoke from upon your neck” (Gen 27:40).

We all know that HASHEM loves and always protects Klal Israel. We ourselves, His children, are likened to a man’s firstborn, as HASHEM Himself refers to us as “My firstborn Israel” (Gen 4:22).

Thus the Romans, descendants of Esau, tortured and killed thousands of Talmidei Chachamim, among whom was Rabbi Akiva and nine of his companions. More than a million Jews were massacred, and hundreds of thousands were exiled and enslaved. The Romans, their formidable armies sowing terror everywhere, defiled and burned the Holy Temple, and just like their ancestor Esau, they showed themselves to be cruel and relentless.

Yet the nations of the Roman Empire were powerful and prosperous despite the fact that they never tried to keep even the smallest mitzvah given to them by G-d. Nevertheless, their rulers, their generals, their artists, their men of science, and their philosophers are known the world over.

Why did HASHEM allow such nations to rejoice over the strength of their power? Why do they act as if the world belonged to them, as if they were the elite of the world?

The answer to this is found in Parsha Toldot: “And you [Esau] will serve the sons of Jacob. But it will happen that when you will struggle [when Israel will transgress the Torah], you will then have a reason to lay claim to the blessings that the Jews received.” Rashi adds: “You will thus free yourself from his yolk.”

Our Sages conclude that “if we respect the Torah and the mitzvot, we will rule over the other nations. Edom will no longer be able to harm us. But if we slacken, it will be Esau and the peoples that descend from him that will rule.”

To explain the reason for which HASHEM gives them this power, the Maggid of Dubno employs one of his famous stories: There was once a kindhearted and wise king who had a son that he loved above all. He employed the best servants and most experienced caretakers to look after him. When the child was hungry, he was served a succulent meal. When he wanted to play, the maids brought him the most enjoyable toys. The most skillful tailors prepared the most elegant clothes for him, and the most brilliant instructors instilled in him a love of study. The most devoted group thus watched over him and were only too happy to cater to his every need.

Unfortunately, despite all the care that he was surrounded by, the prince fell ill, so ill in fact that the best doctors in the court despaired that they could cure him. Doctors from abroad, from remote countries, were even called in, but it was all for naught, as each one would sadly shake his head and repeat that the king’s son wouldn’t last for long. However, an old doctor claimed that there was still a chance.

“I will try to heal your son,” he assured the king. “For this however, I require two things: The first is that you don’t come near your son while I’m treating him, since it would be very difficult for me to restrain him in your presence while administering the bitter potions necessary to save his life. The second is that everyone who has been taking care of your son up to now should be

dismissed. Your son has been served by people who were entirely devoted to him, who loved him, and who tried to make his life as easy as possible. They must be replaced by someone who, on the contrary, is cruel and selfish. Only a really mean person with a heart of stone can help him. That person should force your son to swallow his horrible tasting medicine and make him undergo the most painful treatments. That person should forbid your son from eating what he usually likes, for otherwise his medication will be ineffective. Whoever loves the prince will have pity on him, and so won’t be able to act this way. And yet it’s the only way to save him. You must search your kingdom for spiteful men, and choose the most savage, the most merciless to take care of your son until he regains his health.”

Understanding that this was the only way to save his beloved son, the king accepted. He immediately sent his messengers to the four corners of his kingdom in search of hardhearted scoundrels. The messengers had no problem coming up with the type of people required. They brought back men who were cruel and savage (and proud of it!), who didn’t stop bragging that they had been chosen by the king to heal the prince.

One of the king’s ministers, who could no longer bear their self-parading, decided to put them in their place.

“You ridiculous bunch of pretentious clowns! Do you really think that you were chosen because you’re good? You’re nothing but a bunch of fools! His majesty had no other choice but to entrust this mission with you. The prince is very sick and in need of your animal-like cruelty. It’s not through your kindness and gentleness that the young man will be healed, but on the contrary, it will be as a result of your spite and hardheartedness. And that’s why you’re here. As soon as the prince gets better, the king will kick you out, dirty louts that you are!”

The prophet Obadiah addressed Edom, the nation of Esau, in the same terms: “Behold, I have made you inferior among the nations; you are very despised. The wickedness of your heart has misled you, [you] who dwells in the clefts of the rocks [in] his lofty abode, who says in his heart, ‘Who can bring me down to earth?’” (Ob 1:2-3).

When Israel falls “sick” – which is to say, when he no longer respects Torah and mitzvot – our Father the King, HASHEM, calls for the cruel children of Esau to administer drastic medication that will “heal” him. This is not a mark of honor for Esau. It is done, rather, in order to utilize his spite and merciless behavior for our good.

One must therefore not forget that, when we see Esau/Edom becoming a powerful and world-conquering nation, HASHEM is behind it all. It is He Who directs events, and He does it for our own good.

If only we returned to Him in all sincerity, Edom – the “head taskmaster” – would be forever banished from the palace. We would then be free to serve HASHEM with a joyous heart, in peace and abundance, and HASHEM would once again multiply His blessings and kindnesses.