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ESAU'S HATRED - DISTANCING ONESELF FROM A WICKED NEIGHBOR

Rabbi David Pinto Chlita

Regarding 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 וְיִ ("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 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.

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Rules Concerning Eating**Grace After Meals And Other Blessings***According to Rav Ovadia Yossef, Zatsal*

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.

- 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 SECRET OF ESAU: EDOM'S 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.

Credit must go to Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia for the rebuilding and restructuring of the Jewish community of Tiberias. Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia was born in Hebron in 1660, and rendered his soul to G-d on Nissan 6, 1744.

During his youth, Hebron's Jewish community sent him on a mission to Turkey, where his knowledge and wisdom enabled him to be named Chief Rabbi of Izmir. In addition, upon returning to the Holy Land he was named Chief Rabbi of Sefat and later of Tiberias. He was the friend and study partner of two of the greatest sages of his generation: The author of Peri Hadash and the author of Ohr HaChayim Hakadosh. He himself wrote several important works on Torah, in particular Etz Chaim, Mikraei Kodesh, Yosef Lechah, Shevuot Yaakov, Yachei Yaakov, and a commentary on the laws of Passover and the holidays.

Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia committed himself to the spiritual resurrection of Tiberias' Jewish community through the construction of yeshivas and synagogues. As well, he consecrated himself to the development of the city itself by improving numerous homes for the community. Yet he didn't stop there, as the members of the community owed him much – some their jobs, some their livelihoods. In fact Rabbi Chaim, whose name had become synonymous with chesed (generosity), was responsible for reviving the famous Rabbi Meir Baal Haness fund, a communal fund devoted to the city's poor. He didn't hesitate to send messages, and messengers, to the Diaspora and call Jews the world over to come help their brothers in Tiberias.

During that era, the Holy Land's Jewish community was weak, and the country's roads were fraught with danger. An Arab Sheik, who had rebelled against the central controlling power, marched on Tiberias and took control of the town and its surroundings. This Sheik wanted to develop the region under his control and knew that he could only achieve this with the help of the Jewish community. He hoped that Jews would settle in Tiberias, create jobs by investing there, and give the city a much-needed boost. In doing so, the Sheik also sought to increase his power base and political standing against the Pasha (high ranking official) who ruled in Damascus.

This Sheik therefore wrote letters to the leaders of the Jewish communities in Turkey, proposing that they encourage their brothers to settle in Tiberias. He promised to grant them protection and rights.

Thus Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia, who was then Chief Rabbi of Izmir in Turkey, had found an opportunity to return to the Holy Land, which he did as soon as possible with his family and a dozen of his students. Beforehand, however, he went through the entire city collecting funds aimed at strengthening the community of Tiberias. On the day that he did this, the Sultan was also in town, and when he came across Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia, he saw a column of fire above the head of the Tzaddik.

The Sultan hastened to have Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia approach him, then showed him so much respect that the Sultan's counselors were astonished.

"If you had seen the column of fire above his head as I did, you too would have showed him honor," he replied.

The Sultan wasn't content to simply show Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia honor. When he learned that the great Rabbi was gathering funds for his sacred cause, he rushed to give him a very large sum of money.

Thanks to this, as soon as he arrived in Tiberias, Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia took to renovating a synagogue located in the very same place that the Arizal used to pray. The community didn't cease to grow and develop with every new wave of immigrants from countries abroad. It was thus that Rabbi Chaim, after having built a magnificent synagogue, went on to create stores, public markets, and local industries as well.

It was not surprising that the author of Ohr HaChayim, on the day that he immigrated to the Holy Land, decided to settle in Tiberias, and this even before coming to Jerusalem. The Rabbi of the city endeavored to persuade him to stay and build a yeshiva there, but the author of Ohr HaChayim replied that he couldn't do so before receiving a letter from by his Italian friends. The Chief Rabbi of Tiberias therefore dispatched messages to the leaders of the Jewish communities in Italy.

Before the answer could arrive, however, it happened that the Pasha of Damascus resolved to quell the Arab Sheik's rebellion, and so he dispatched a significant military force to Tiberias with firm intention of reconquering it. For 85 days, assault troops tried subjecting the city to such massive bombardment that Rabbi Chaim's friends begged

him to escape. But he stubbornly refused, certain that Tiberias would not suffer from this attack. With a surprising calm, he promised that with G-d's help, nothing bad would happen. And in fact the shells aimed at Tiberias miraculously missed all their targets and landed in Lake Kinneret.

Among the assault troops, the rumor quickly spread that the bombardment's failure was a result of Rabbi Chaim's influence on the decisions of Heaven. They sensed that there was nothing they could do against Rabbi Chaim's prayers, and so decided to rise up against their commanding officer and break camp.

This occurred on Kislev 4, and in order to commemorate this miracle (comparable to the one of Purim) Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia decreed that every year from then on, Kislev 4 would be a holiday for the Jewish community of Tiberias.

Several months later, the Pasha of Damascus once again attempted to attack. This time his troops assaulted the city from every side, including from the water. Frightened, the city's inhabitants joined together at the synagogue to hear Rabbi Chaim say to them, "Don't be afraid. Remember that today is Friday, the eve of Shabbat. Tomorrow we read Parsha Shoftim, and in its Haftorah it is stated, 'Who are you that you should be afraid of mortal men?'"

The next day, Shabbat, Rabbi Chaim again encouraged his compatriots by repeating this same prophetic verse.

Thus it was on Sunday that an emissary from the city of Akko arrived and announced that on the day earlier, the Pasha of Damascus fell seriously ill and died the very same day. All danger having thus finally been removed, the inhabitants of Tiberias decided that Elul 7 would itself be a holiday as well, in the same way as Purim.

From this we can easily understand that Divine protection never ceased to accompany Rabbi Chaim, a protection that provided him with success in all his endeavors.

Of particular relevance to this subject is the following story, which occurred well before Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia settled in Tiberias to become Chief Rabbi.

One day Rabbi Chaim traveled to Sefat on a pilgrimage in order to pray at the tombs of the Tzaddikim. On the way back he passed by Tiberias, which was then a small town with a scanty population, inhabited solely by Bedouins. Rabbi Chaim sent his Shamash (assistant) into town to buy him something to eat. When there, however, a group of non-Jewish youths ganged-up on the Shamash, throwing stones at him and then violently hitting him. They finally stopped and left, but the poor Shamash, who could only speak Turkish, Hebrew, and Spanish, didn't know what to do. He happened to notice a passer-by, who saw the Shamash and came to his aid. This man spoke a little Turkish, and our Shamash managed to explain to him what happened. From his description of what transpired, the man understood that the leader of the youths was the son of the Sheik of Tiberias. The man therefore suggested to the Shamash that he come with him to the Sheik, and assured him that the latter would not remain indifferent to this incident, and would no doubt punish his son for having publicly dishonored his father by his disgraceful conduct.

The Shamash accepted and followed the man to the Sheik, where he explained everything. And so indeed the Sheik became violently enraged and resolved to punish his son as he deserved: "Even 100 clubs on his back wouldn't be enough to pardon such an offence!"

Having heard from the Shamash that he served the great Tzaddik Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia, the Sheik thereafter asked if he could meet him. Thus Rabbi Chaim came to the Sheik, who received him with great honor. He was impressed by the both the Rabbi and his Shamash, and confided in Rabbi Chaim the following: "The punishment that I swore to inflict on my son is clearly too severe. Please advise me on another punishment, but in such a way that I don't break my oath."

Rabbi Chaim responded, "Since you didn't speak of actually blows, I suggest that you simply place 100 clubs on his back without actually striking him. In this way you will not break your oath, and it will be sufficient to dissuade your son from repeating his offensive behavior."

Hearing such wise advice, the Sheik took a great liking to Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia, and when the time came he generously helped him to rebuild the Jewish community in Tiberias.

The Hilloula of Rabbi Chaim Aboulafia is Nissan 6.