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**The Bialystoker Synagogue
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

*A collection of Divrei Torah
from around the Internet*

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Parshat Toldot
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Latest time for Kriyat Shma – 9:16

THE SEARCH FOR BLESSINGS

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week's parsha begins the saga of the long, almost endless struggle between Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov buys the birthright from a hungry Esav and then, coached by his mother, Rivka, he dresses like Esav and receives blessings from his father Isaac.

I have received numerous letters throughout the years pondering those actions. Indeed, Yaakov himself is wary of acting in a seemingly devious manner and is reassured by his righteous mother who accepts full responsibility for his actions. When Esav arrives for the blessings, his father tells him that his younger brother cleverly took all the blessings, but Esav, despondent as he may be declares to his father, "He (Jacob) took away my birthright and see, now he took away my blessing!" He adds, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Isaac answered, and said to Esau, "Behold, a lord have I made him over you, and all his kin have I given him as servants; with grain and wine have I supported him, and for you, where — what can I do, my son?". And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau raised his voice and wept. (Genesis 27:36-38).

I often wondered about the lesson of this repartee. Esav, clearly angered by Yaakov's cunning, still has clarity of mind to ask for a blessing. Yitzchak seems to demur, inferring that there is nothing left. But Esav prevails by pleading, even crying for a blessing. And only then does his father acquiesce and bless him as well.

Was there a blessing left or not? Can pleading with the saintly patriarch produce a previously non-extant blessing? Maybe Esav's tears taught a lesson even for the children of Yaakov?

30,000 Boy Scouts joined together in Virginia for a national Boy Scout Jamboree. Among the myriad groups of scouts who attend this event that occurs every four years are many Jewish Scouts as well. Mike Paretsky, a Vice Chairman of the GNYC Jewish Committee on scouting, was the kosher food liaison to the jamboree. Special food was ordered from Baltimore, so that the Jewish scouts would be able to nourish their bodies as well. One of the scoutmasters, a Jewish man caught a glimpse of the kosher offerings. He had never eaten a kosher meal in his life, yet when he saw the special meals, something stirred. He and his troops were being served pork-this and bacon-that for breakfast, lunch and supper, and all of a sudden this man decided he was sick of the monotonous treif stuff. He wanted to eat kosher. Scoutmaster Paretsky gladly let him partake in a meal, but that was not enough for the fellow. The man decided to keep kosher during the entire jamboree! Mr. Paretsky agreed to accommodate the neophyte kosherphile, but a skeptic approached him. "Mike," he said, "why are you wasting your kosher food on this fellow? He is not going to eat kosher after this is over, and he observes absolutely nothing! Why waste the food on him?" Mike answered with an amazing story of the Chofetz Chaim:

When Russian soldiers entered the town of Radin, Jewish townfolk prepared kosher meals for the Jewish soldiers in the Czar's army. Soon their acts of charity seemed to fly in their face as they saw the soldiers devour the food and then stand on line to receive the forbidden Russian rations. When they complained to the Chofetz Chaim and threatened to stop preparing kosher food, he reflected with an insight that must be passed on to generations. "Every mitzvah that a Jew does, every good deed and every bit of kosher that he eats is not a fleeting act. It is an eternity. No matter what precedes or ensues, we must cherish each proper action of a Jew."

The wayward son, Esav is at first told by his father that there are no blessings. But he cries bitterly and cannot fathom that fact. "Is there nothing left?" He asks. It cannot be. And he was right. There is always some blessing left to be found. No matter how far one has strayed, no matter how bleak a situation looks. There is always blessing. We must pursue it, even cry for it, and when we receive the tiniest blessing it may seem trivial, even fleeting, but it is with us for eternity.

Different Yet Identical

By Rabbi Moshe Bryski

In introducing us to the patriarchal family of Isaac, son of Abraham, this week's Torah portion of Toldot begins: "And these are the offspring of Isaac, son of Abraham—Abraham begot Isaac." Since Torah is not given to redundancy, this opening passage raises the question: Once we're told that Isaac is the "son of Abraham," what is the point of then stating, "Abraham begot Isaac"?

The Midrash explains that the statement "Abraham begot Isaac" represents divine testimony that Isaac was indeed the biological son of Abraham. That in the face of ridiculers and rumor-mongers who sought to claim that Isaac had been fathered by the Philistine king Abimelech, G-d formed the physical features of Isaac in striking resemblance to those of Abraham, so that there would be no room for doubt that "Abraham begot Isaac."

Another Midrashic comment expands upon this point by saying that this physical resemblance between Abraham and Isaac was a reflection of their spiritual resemblance: the merits, the lofty pursuits, indeed the spiritual DNA, of father and son were likewise completely identical.

Now this declaration of spiritual similarity—let alone resemblance—is most curious.

We're taught that Abraham's primary mode of service was via the attribute of loving kindness (*chessed*). This was repeatedly and poignantly demonstrated by his incessant acts of hospitality, compassion and benevolence. He opened his home to hungry wayfarers. He reached out and taught others with delicate softness and patient sensitivity.

Isaac's primary service, on the other hand, was via the attribute of severity and restraint (*gevurah*). He was a much more demanding sort of fellow. This was demonstrated by his defiant and relentless digging of wells. Even as his enemies kept filling and destroying them, Isaac dug away the rocks and the dirt to uncover the waters beneath. With sharpness and strength, he dug away at the *shmutz*—the evil and the falseness that was seen on the surface—so as to unearth the reservoirs of goodness and truth buried deep within.

Indeed, everything we learn about Abraham and Isaac seems to cry out: *Different!* That if ever there were a father and son who seemed so unlike one another, it was these two highly individualized personalities. Yet the Midrash states that, in fact, Abraham and Isaac resembled one another—in every way!

Within this paradox, seen at the inception of the family of Israel, lies the true beauty of our people. Different situations require different solutions. In the days of Abraham—during which unawareness of a divine presence was rampant—the world needed an Abraham-like personality. In the days of Isaac—especially with hostilities looming on the horizon—the world needed an Isaac-like personality. Yet, these very different individuals, firmly embarked on their very different missions with their very different methods and characteristics, are deemed spiritually (and essentially) identical, because their ultimate focus and goals were one and the same. Their core principles, values and underlying devotion to G-d were completely indistinguishable from one another. They blazed different trails, but both trails led to the same place: toward making their environment a more holy and moral place to live.

The great chassidic master, Reb Zushe of Hanipoli, once remarked that when he thinks about the interrogation that might await him after his days on earth are done, he is not worried that he might be asked: "Zushe, why could you not attain the heights of an Abraham, a Moses or a King David?"

Such concerns did not trouble him. His one and only source of trepidation was that the question would be posed: "Zushe, why were you not as great as Zushe?"

You are expected to rise to the heights of your own very special and unique potential—no more, no less.

Judaism, and the Torah way of life, celebrates individuality. We are each endowed with our own gifts and talents, our own passions and modes of expression. In terms of personality and character, none of us are truly alike. This is the way G-d created us, for it is only through the diverse expression of the multitudes that His true intent in creating this world can be realized.

Each and every Jewish man, woman and child plays his or her own special instrument within the symphony that is Judaism. Within the context and framework of *halachah* and tradition are endless means and modes of service of the Almighty. From the intellectual to the emotional, from the ritualistic to the artistic, we are called upon to experience it all, even as we shine in some areas more than others. What inspires, stimulates and intrigues some may not do the same for others.

Yet, at the pinnacle of it all, is that special place in which we are, and must remain, identical. Within the essential goals of living and being true to the principles of our holy Torah is where there is a beautiful resemblance among all of the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Let each instrument of the orchestra contribute its own special notes, with its own special sound and rhythm. Yet let us make certain that we are playing the same piece of music—as guided by that one and only Conductor—so that rather than a cacophony of disjointed noise, we have a beautiful symphony of harmonious diversity.

Beans and Birthrights

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

In this week's *parshah* we read of the birth of twins to Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob and Esau are very different from the moment they leave the womb. As they grow older, their disparate personality traits become increasingly obvious. Jacob is the "dweller of tents," a diligent Torah scholar, while Esau is a "skilled hunter" and a man of violence.

We also read how one day, when Esau returns from the hunt, exhausted and starving, he finds Jacob cooking a pot of lentils. Esau wants the beans; Jacob offers to give him the pottage in return for Esau's birthright. As the first-born twin, Esau would have been the one chosen to minister in G-d's temple. Esau accepts the offer and the deal is done.

Fast-forward some 275 years. We're in the Book of Exodus now (4:22), and G-d is sending Moses to Pharaoh to redeem His people. He describes them as *b'ni bechori yisrael* — "My son, My first born, Israel." Rashi, quoting the Midrash, comments: "Here the Holy One Blessed is He affixed His seal to the sale of the birthright which Jacob purchased from Esau."

Here? It took G-d so long to put His stamp of approval on a deal that was entered into hundreds of years earlier? Why only now?

The late Israeli Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi M.Z. Neriyah, offered this explanation: *You can sell your birthright for beans, but you can't buy a birthright for beans.* To throw away one's holy heritage is easy, but to claim it takes years of effort and much hard work.

He used the analogy of a war hero who earned a row of medals for bravery and courage under fire. Sadly, in his old age he was forced to sell his medals in order to survive. So someone else walks into the pawnbroker's and finds these war medals for sale, buys them and pins them to his chest. He might walk down the street, proud as a peacock. But does it have any meaning? We all know that this man is no hero. In fact, he is nothing more than a pathetic fool!

To wear the badge of "My firstborn Israel," the Jewish people had to be worthy of the honor. It wasn't enough that their father Jacob had purchased the birthright from an unworthy but willing seller. The children of Jacob needed to demonstrate that they understood what it meant to be Children of Israel.

When Jacob bought the birthright from Esau it was a legal deal. One wanted the beans, the other wanted the birthright. Fair and square. But did Jacob earn that hallowed title, or was he like the fellow who bought the war medals? Generations later, when his children had gone through the "smelting pit" of the Egyptian bondage and still, with amazing faith and tenacity, kept their heritage — then they were deemed worthy of the honor of the birthright. Now, after the trial by fire, after the blood, sweat and tears of slavery, the great Notary on High, the heavenly Commissioner of Oaths, takes out that ancient document, the yellowed deed of sale that had been waiting for generations, and puts His official stamp and the wax seal on that document, and says, "Now you are worthy of the birthright. Today you are My Son, My Firstborn, Israel."

There's a famous graffiti exchange that has much truth in it. Someone not too partial to our people had scrawled, "How odd of G-d, to choose the Jews." And one of our own responded, "Actually, the Jews chose G-d."

Being Jewish is indeed the birthright of every Jew. But it's not enough that G-d chose us, we must choose G-d. We need to earn our birthright by living as Jews. Chosenness is not license to snicker or condescend to others. It is far more responsibility than privilege.

It's not good enough that our parents and grandparents were good Jews, that my Zayde was a rabbi or a *schochet* and my Bobba made the world's best blintzes. What are *we* doing to earn our stripes?

Indeed, you can sell your birthright for beans. But you can't buy a birthright for beans.

“The lads grew up and Esav was one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents” (25:27)

Rabbi Nissan Alpert asks: Why is “yosheiv” spelled without a “vov,” in a way that can be read as “yoshav,” “sat,” in the past tense? Rabbi Alpert answers that the deficient spelling indicates that something is missing. Yaakov always felt that he was imperfect and had a lot more to accomplish. One only becomes a complete person by feeling that he has not yet reached the top and not yet accomplished all that he is capable of. Esav is the exact opposite. The letters of the word Esav also spell “asu,” “complete.” Esav felt that he was complete, that he had nothing left to accomplish and had no more potential to grow.

“Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your offspring will I give all these lands, and establish the oath that I swore to Avraham your father” (26:3)

Rashi explains that the word **האל** is the same as the word **האלה** and both mean "these." Nevertheless, it is still a strange word. Why is the alternative form used in this context? The Torah uses a word which can also be read as the name of Hashem in connection with Eretz Yisrael. By referring to Eretz Yisrael as **הארצות האל**, the posuk alludes to the fact that Eretz Yisrael is the land of Hashem. When a person lives in Eretz Yisrael, he is closer to Hashem. There are special laws that only apply in Eretz Yisrael. Accordingly, the events and status of the Land should be on our mind and the welfare of its inhabitants should always be our concern. The Torah connects Hashem's name with Eretz Yisrael to teach us to value the Land and how important it must be to us.

“Avimelech said to Yitzchak: Go away from us, for you have become much stronger than we” (26:16)

R' Avraham ben HaRambam, as cited by Shaarei Aharon, has a novel interpretation of this posuk. Avimelech was not only saying that Yitzchak had become stronger than the Pelishtim, but that he had become stronger from the Pelishtim. He claimed that Yitzchak had become rich off of the Pelishtim, exploiting them and succeeding at their expense. This complete fabrication was the first of many such claims throughout history. We find it again in next week's parsha, where Lavan's sons claim that Yaakov became wealthy by taking that which rightfully belonged to their father. We find many times throughout our exile when jealous gentiles accused Jews of making money off of them instead of recognizing that the Jews made an honest living and worked hard to earn their success.

“He moved away from there and dug another well and they did not quarrel over it; so he named it Rechovos and said: For now Hashem has made room for us and we will be fruitful in the land” (26:22)

Ramban interprets the story of Yitzchak's three wells and the fights that broke out over them as foreshadowing of the three Batei Mikdash. The Shlah, cited by Me'am Lo'ez, finds an additional lesson about the third Beis HaMikdash and the arrival of Moshiach in the third well. After finally digging a well that was uncontested, Yitzchak said, “Now Hashem has made room for us.” This hints to the fact that the third Beis HaMikdash is dependent on “now,” our actions at every moment could be the key its arrival. We must have complete faith that Moshiach could come each and every day. If we are cognizant of the potential of each moment in the day, we will live fuller lives and hopefully bring Moshiach very soon.

“So Yitzchak sent away Yaakov and he went toward Padan Aram, to Lavan the son of Besuel the Aramean, brother of Rivkah, mother of Yaakov and Esav” (28:5)

Rashi comments on the seemingly unnecessary description of Rivkah as "the mother of Yaakov and Esav" that he did not know what this is meant to teach us. Why did Rashi feel the need to say this? Why did he not just refrain from commenting in the first place? The Chazon Ish explained that when a person studies Torah, he must be aware of what he knows and what he does not know. A person has to be honest with himself and admit that he does not know what the meaning of something is. One should not gloss over something and claim to understand it. Rather, he should be truthful to himself, admit that he has a question and then move on if he finds himself unable to resolve the problem. Rashi intentionally commented that he did not know something to teach that this is the appropriate attitude to have. Sometimes it is important to say "I don't know."

By Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Eisav's Foibles

By Sheldon Stern

My mother and I bonded by watching TV together, particularly "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson and "whodunits." "Yanki, that man with the moustache looks like a bad guy, do you think he's the killer?" "Ma, I would answer, your guess is as good as mine." But when they'd go to a commercial, my mother took over, "That company's probably not doing well. You see, they have to advertise." My mother had this endearing innocence, which made her a Lower East Side legend and it wasn't my place to try to change her outlook on life. There's a commercial from my youth which provides an insight into the "bad guy" in this week's Parsha, that would be Eisav.

Let's set the scene, "There's a fish called Charlie hanging out in the ocean. He's boning up on his Shakespeare, "To be or not to be." But before he can finish the line, the Starkist trawler arrives and the fishermen throw their nets into the water. Ah nirvana for our would be thespian, who's certain that by mastering the arts he'll earn the distinction of becoming a Starkist tuna. However, as the dastardly Snidely Whiplash would utter after his evil plans were thwarted by Dudley Do-Right, "curses foiled again," alas and alack Charlie is again found wanting as the narrator dolefully announces, "Sorry Charlie, Starkist doesn't want tuna with good taste, it wants tuna that tastes good." Genesis 26:34 relates that Eisav was 40 years old when he married two Hittite women, Yehudis and Basemas." The age is significant, i.e. his beloved father was also 40 when he tied the knot. And Eisav stays true to form at the end of the Parsha. Verse 28:9 states that he married Machalas the daughter of Yishmael. He hoped, with this act, to get back into his parents' good graces. Eisav saw that Yaakov was dispatched to Avraham's homeland to find a wife, so he also took a spouse from Avraham's family.

If we think about it, Eisav is Charlie. He wants the significant others in his life to be impressed by his externals. That's why Chazal compare Eisav to the Chazir, the only member of the animal kingdom to have the one Kosher sign of split hooves. Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld ZTL put it best, "Today there are no religious Jews, there are only Jews who do religious things. Let's analyze what that Godol meant. I don't think his point was that people cherry pick mitzvohs. Rabbi Berel Wein ZTL commented on the fact that so many of our ancestors, in coming to these shores, threw their Tefilin overboard, "The commitment of the European Jew was a mile wide and an inch deep." Yes, they kept everything, but it meant precious little to them. There was a popular song during WWI, "How You Gonna Keep them Down on the Farm After They've Seen Patee." For the emigres, America was the "Goldene Medina" and its allure was all the Yetzer hora needed to convince so many to shuck their Yiddishkeit. My mother told me that when her father left Galicia in 1912 his father told him, "Ich Beit Di Ein Zach, Arbet Nisht of Shabbos." I ask one thing of you, never work on Shabbos. Boruch Hashem he kept his word. So this then, was the Shor Yoshuv Rosh Yeshiva's intent, "If people perform the Mitzvohs in a perfunctory manner they won't become religious and when challenged they may entirely abandon the faith." And this was Eisav. If Charlie didn't have the taste that Starkist sought, Eisav hut nisht gehat kein Yiddishe Taam. Therefore, even though, as Rabbi Miller said, he was a scholar par excellence, that didn't translate into making him a Torah Jew.

But maybe our Patriarch's nemesis gets an unfair rap. The Torah tells us (Gen 25:27) "Yaakov Ish Tam, Yoshev Baaholim.") Yaakov is a simple person, who "just" wants to sit and learn. Es Chatai Ani Mazkir Hayom. Previously I noted that when I was in my thirties, I had to decide between the Potoker Rav and Rabbi Friedman, and I chose the latter as my Rav. Growing up, I attended the Stanton St, Synagogue with my father. The Mora D'Asra was a beautiful man of Chassidic lineage named Rabbi Yosef Singer. At my father's Levaya he said, "Solaran(that's how people pronounced my father's name Yisrael Aharon.) was my best friend." They loved each other, but it was hard for me to warm up to Rabbi Singer because of the age difference and language barrier(more so the latter.) But I do recall something that this nobleman taught me, "Mir Daft Zein A ganif to tein Mitzvohs" You have to be a thief to do Mitzvohs. I don't know if that's a Chazal or something he heard growing up in the Shtetl, but it totally sums up Yaakov Avinu's existence in this mortal coil. With all the difficulties he faced he had to keep his eyes focused on the prize. And we know that he succeeded because several Parshas later he tells Eisav, "Im Lavan Garti." i.e. despite having to deal with that conniver Lavan my Torah wasn't compromised one iota. I was told that the Potoker learned 7 blatt a day during his years hiding from the Nazis in the forest. He told his grandson, "I didn't learn out of enjoyment, or because it's a Mitzvah, it was the only way I could keep my wits about me." And we also know who Yishmael was. Gen 16:12 describes him, "He will be a wild donkey of a man, his hand will be against everyone." This was Yishmael, and today we see that all too well. Yes he did Tshuvah which was a remarkable accomplishment, but unfortunately his essence remained and was transmitted to his descendants. But then we come to Eisav, as the Who sang, "Who Are You?" The Torah doesn't tell us. Rather, it just says, Gen 25:25 "The first one came out red." What does that mean?

Albert King, in 1967, scored with one of the quintessential blues songs, "Born Under a Bad Sign." which was covered by a number of the world's greatest guitarists. Another clue. U2's classic New Year's Day contains the line, "Under a Blood Red Sky." So redness indicate a predisposition to bellicosity, Let's return to Parshas Bereishis. In verse 4:7 Hashem tells Kayin, "Sin is crouching at your door, it seeks to dominate you, but you must rule over it." Unlike Yishmael, who needed a herculean effort to stanch his murderous nature, Eisav had the where with all to do so, but he failed. The Midrash tells us that on the day that Avraham died his elder grandson committed the three cardinal sins. Chazal analyze these infractions and note that he killed Nimrod to steal his precious cloak. That doesn't seem like such a bad thing. After all, Nimrod was the Hitler of his time. So the Baalei Mussar explain that Eisav enjoyed the act. But again, "Why is that a deficit? Didn't we consider the soldier who took out Bin Laden a hero?"

So let's take a step back. Eisav is conflicted. He truly loves his father and wants to please him, however, his natural inclination finds spirituality an anathema. I had a friend years ago who told me that he wanted to be a lawyer but his father was Yeshivish and so college was out of the question. IMHO the father was wrong. So Eisav was, as Mary McGregor sang in 1976, "Torn Between Two Lovers." On the one hand he loved his father, but on the other he loved himself. When he killed Nimrod and he felt that rush, it was Katy Bar the Door. As Rickey Nelson wrote in his 1972 Garden Party, "If you can't please everyone, so you've got to please yourself." And this decision ruined Eisav.

Hindsight, as they say, is 20-20 so what should the father of Edom have done? Dovid Hamelech also had that red sign. Did he succumb to his murderous nature? Absolutely. Since he felt the urge to kill he took it out on his peoples' enemies and Hashem considered these acts as if he was bringing Korbonos on the Altar of the Beis Hamikdash. The Gemara succinctly states, "Rachmana Liba Boi." Hashem wants our hearts, meaning He wants us to be devoted to Him. Obviously, Hashem knows our inclinations, since He gave them to us, but He also knows that we can rule over them if we bend our desires to conform with His will.

The astute reader might as Donovan said in his classic 1965 hit Mellow Yellow, "Quite rightly" ask why we need to focus on Eisav. The answer is obvious. We've got far more in common with that knave than with Yaakov. By studying his slipups, we can develop strategies to avoid making the same mistakes. But one might protest, "If Eisav, who was a genius, and who had perfect parents and a brother with sterling Middos couldn't overcome his "natural" tendencies, how can we hope to do so? The truth is that it was because Eisav was surrounded by such superlative individuals that his die was cast. Could he tell his father about his lusts? The answer is yes, but not in Eisav's mind and so he led a double life and found comfort with the locals who accepted him flaws and all. But our situation is not so dire. Rabbi Miller, commenting on the Jewish march through the Yam Suf cited the Midrash that our antecedents traversed through twelve separate channels, one for each tribe. He noted that this teaches that diversity is a hallmark of Judaism. And he's absolutely right. However, this doesn't just mean that each group must acknowledge the mores of the other. Far more important is that they view each thread as separate but equally valid expressions of Yiddishkeit. Far too many wonderful boys and girls go lost because they feel that they can't meet the standards set by their parents and teachers. Sadly, those influencers never give them the option of finding their own niche. Instead they're hit with the OTD label. As Lindsey Buckingham of Fleetwood Mac sang, "You Can Go Your Own Way" as a Jew and not get lost, but parents must learn to be flexible and understanding. As George wrote in his "Living in the Material World" "we've got a lot of work to do, got to get our message through." As the Sylvers sang in 1973, "We Can Make It If We Try."

"May God give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine." (27:28)

The Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit 66:3) expounds this blessing allegorically in three different ways, which may be seen as corresponding to three different periods in Jewish history: the period of forty years in the wilderness; the period of residence in the Land of Israel; and the period of exile. In the wilderness, the dew referred to the manna, the fatness of the earth to Miriam's well, abundant grain to the young men who would enter Eretz Yisroel, and abundant wine to young Jewish maidens. In Eretz Yisrael, the dew was interpreted as a reference to Jerusalem, the fatness of the land a reference to sacrificial offerings, abundant grain a reference to the First Fruits, and abundant wine a reference to the wine libations. During the exile, the dew alludes to Torah, the fatness of the earth alludes to Mishnah, abundant grain alludes to Talmud, and abundant wine alludes to Midrash.

However, it may be suggested that the ultimate and literal fulfillment of Yitzchak's blessing will be realized as a precursor to 'Kibbutz Galuyot' - Ingathering of the Exiles - as the Talmud teaches regarding the order of the blessings in the Amidah: "Why did they place the blessing regarding 'Ingathering of the Exiles' after the 'Blessing of the Years'? For it says (Yechezkel 36:8): "But you, O mountains of Israel, will give forth your branch and bear your fruit for My people, Israel, for they are soon to come.""

In advance of the return of the exiles, the Land of Israel will give forth its produce in great and glorious abundance. This blessing is being witnessed in our very days.

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The Inevitable Struggle

By Rabbi Berel Wein

The frightening thing about the struggle between Eisav and Yaakov is its apparently doomed inevitability. While yet in the womb of their mother Rivkah, they already find themselves opposed to one another. They are not only two different personalities, physically, emotionally and intellectually, but they represent two diametrically opposed worldviews. The only question that remains is therefore one of accommodating one another.

If the Lord created them so differently, their freedom of choice in life is centered on how they will deal one with another. And in that respect, the question of accommodation – of the relationship between the Jewish people and the broader, more numerous and powerful non-Jewish world – remains alive and relevant until our very day.

Eisav varies and wavers in his attitude towards Yaakov. Hatred, jealousy, scapegoating frustration are all present in certain aspects of his behavior patterns towards Yaakov. And yet there is also a grudging admiration and attempts at reconciliation on the part of Eisav. Yaakov is portrayed as reactive towards Eisav, of a more passive nature, of patiently attempting to wait out the situation and hope that Eisav will calm down and reconcile himself to Yaakov's right of existence – in what Eisav considers to be his exclusive world.

And, therefore, the question arises – in reality the question of all of the ages – is there room in the world, especially our rapidly shrinking world, for Yaakov and Eisav to coexist peacefully. One would hope so, though history belies this optimistic view of the rivalry between the brothers.

The Torah itself is pretty much noncommittal about the causes for the true source of Eisav's hatred of Yaakov. Even though Yaakov's purchase of the birthright and his subsequent preempting of his father's blessings are ostensibly the cause of Eisav's displeasure with Yaakov, these are only superficial. For the hatred was there from the beginning, from the moment of their conception, even though no incidents between them had as yet occurred.

The Torah just seems to take it for granted that this is the way it is going to be. And this accounts to a great degree for the almost traditional Jewish attitude of fatalism regarding the behavior of the non-Jewish world towards the Jews. Rabi Shimon ben Yochai stated in the Talmud that it is a given rule that Eisav hates Yaakov. However, there are other opinions there in the Talmud that take a different tack and belie this inevitability of hatred and violence.

After the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, Jews felt that perhaps Eisav had finally reformed and had seen the evil of the ways of hatred and bigotry. Almost seventy years later we are not so certain about this hopefully sanguine view of Eisav's reconciliation with Yaakov. Though we are certainly less accepting and passive about the situation now than we were a century ago, nevertheless there are relatively few options left to us as how to deal with the matter.

We should minimize whatever frictions possible but realize that we are dealing with a millennia-old problem that cannot be just wished away or papered over. Faith and fortitude in our own self-worth are the strongest weapons in our arsenal to bring Eisav to reconciliation and harmony.