

PARSHAS TOLDOS – DR JEFFREY FREILICH

How far to go for a Brochah - Adapted from the אהל יעקב

In this week's sedra, there is a detailed account of how יעקב acquired the ברכות of לך ויתן עשו . The Dubna Maggid, in the אהל יעקב, asks why was it necessary for יצחק to burden עשו with preparing a tasty meal for him before blessing him? Surely he could have blessed him without it. He answers that יצחק felt in his heart that something wasn't quite right in giving Hashem's ברכות to עשו . In order to overcome his reluctance and to rise to the 'challenge', he gave עשו this task נפשי תברכך בעבור תברכה לי מטעמים meaning to say that I will then be able to bless you with a willing heart. The Dubna Maggid suggests that רבקה detected the unease of יצחק in blessing עשו by requiring him to prepare a tasty meal and related it to יעקב so that he should follow her advice.

The שפת היריעה, a commentary on the אהל יעקב, adds the following observation. We don't find in comparable situations, such as when יעקב blessed his sons or when משה רבינו blessed כלל ישראל, that they required to be given a meal beforehand. He suggests there were 3 essential factors at play here. The first is as stated above. עשו wasn't worthy to be blessed and יצחק needed an external stimulant. He notes that רבקה says to יעקב "listen to what is in my voice" שמע בקולי with an extra 'beis'. This is an allusion to her רוח הקודש as we find a similar expression שמע בקולה with שרה אמינו . This is רבקה justifying herself to יעקב . The fact that יצחק needs an external stimulant shows that what he is about to do, viz bless עשו, is not based on רוח הקודש, whereas what I am telling you to do, is based on רוח הקודש . The second is that עשו needed to perform the Mitzva of כיבוד אב so that he could become worthy of a ברכה . Rivka counters this by giving יעקב a command, as it says לאשר אני מצוה אותך . What I am telling you to do is not just advice but the fulfilment of מצות כבוד אם . The third factor is that it was ordained in Heaven that there should be a delay in the procedure, effected by עשו going out to hunt and preparing the meal. In the intervening time period, יעקב was able to receive the ברכות . When רבקה says to Yaacov "Go to the sheep" - that I have at the ready - there is a hint to this being his chance to get in first. The שפת היריעה points out the extreme that רבקה was willing to go to secure the ברכות for יעקב, in accepting upon herself all untoward consequences בני קללתך . This, he says, was actually fulfilled by her forfeiting the possibility of seeing her beloved son for the rest of her life.

The Dubna Maggid also asks why was it that initially יצחק did not want to bestow on יעקב the ברכות of לך ויתן עשו and in what way did we benefit from the ברכות if in subsequent generations we suffered poverty ? He explains that the intention of יצחק was to separate יעקב from the goodness of this world in order that his reward in עולם הבא should not be diminished. Better not to revel in the pleasures or enjoyments of this world as its says וישמן ישורון . However רבקה saw with her רוח הקודש that the ברכות could serve a good purpose in the hands of יעקב even if he weren't to derive much benefit from them. That is because they could act as an ערבון, a pledge, against any harsh decree that כלל ישראל may become liable to. At times when we are in great trouble, the pledge serves to atone for our souls and saves us from destruction. True there have been periods when we have been persecuted, pillaged and impoverished, but thanks to the ברכות granted to יעקב אבינו, Hashem provided a way for the remnant of Israel to survive through the dark ages of the גלות and for us to be alive till this day.

To mark the yahrzeit of Rev E. Freilich ז"ל כסלו תשע"ד
ד"ר כסלו תשע"ד הרב ישעי' נתן ע"ה