



הגורל

The Divine Lottery

■ The Blessed Field

The story of Parashat Toldot features the winding chain of events that led Yitzchak Avinu to give the Divine blessing to Yaakov, and not, as he had planned, to Esav.

Yitzchak asks Esav to prepare him a meal and receive the blessing; Rivka overhears and tells Yaakov to take his brother's place; Yitzchak is fooled and gives the blessing to Yaakov. He soon realizes his mistake, but though he *“trembled greatly”* (B'reshit 27,33), he did not retract the blessing from Yaakov.

Many aspects of this story are quite difficult. Let us list some of them:

1. Why did the Patriarch Yitzchak insist on granting the blessing to Esav, despite his negative and problematic character?
2. Why did Rivka choose a deceptive manner by which to ensure that justice - as she saw it - was served?
3. How was it that Yitzchak, a life-long shepherd, was unable to differentiate between a goatskin (which Rivka placed on Yaakov's arms to give him Esav's hirsute semblance) and human hair?
4. When Yaakov brought Yitzchak his meal, Yitzchak was hesitant. He said, *“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the arms are those of Esav”* (27,22). When faced with such a contradiction, isn't it obvious that the voice is more authentic and trustworthy than the external trappings of hair and the like? External appearance can be disguised; why did Yitzchak not follow the voice?

An important clue in understanding the many questions aroused by this story can be found in the following verse describing the meeting between the disguised Yaakov and Yitzchak:

וַיִּגַּשׁ וַיִּשָּׁק לוֹ וַיֵּרַח אֶת רֵיחַ בְּגָדָיו וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ.
וַיֹּאמֶר, רֵיחַ בְּנֵי כְרִיחַ שְׂדֵה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַכְוּ ה'.

Yaakov [dressed as Esav] approached and kissed Yitzchak, and Yitzchak smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him. He said: "See, my son's fragrance is like that of a field blessed by G-d." (27,27)

This verse, too, raises several questions:

1. What is the source of this intoxicating *fragrance of a field blessed by G-d*?
2. What happened to the goatskins' unpleasant smell? To where did it disappear?
3. Why did this special fragrance lead Yitzchak to immediately bless Yaakov?

Yitzchak well knows the smell of a real field. Way back when the servant Eliezer returned from Aram with Yitzchak's future wife Rivka, Yitzchak already had an attachment to the fields:

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לָשׁוּחַ בְּשָׂדֵה לַפְּנוֹת עָרֶב...

Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field before evening... (24,63)

Yitzchak Avinu, seeking a place to pour out his heart in prayer before Hashem, found it in the fields, where he would share the swaying song and prayer of the golden wheat. It was there, as the sun flickered into twilight, that Yitzchak instituted the Mincha prayer. It was also precisely then that Rivka arrived on Eliezer's camels, and saw this man of G-d raising his arms heavenward in prayer. She immediately asked: **"Who is that man walking in the field towards us?"** (verse 65) Rivka recognized at once the sublime and delicate bonds between her future husband and the fields.

■ Man of the Field

Yitzchak recognized that his older son Esav was also a man of fields, blessed with tremendous field-related strengths:

וַיְהִי עֹשֵׂוֹ אִישׁ יָדַע צֹיד אִישׁ שְׂדֵה...

Esav was an expert in hunting, a man of the field... (25,27)

But this was of course not the same type of field to which Yitzchak was so attached. Yitzchak's fields were replete with prayer and longing for Hashem, while Esav's were exclusively those of hunting: coarse, animalistic and even cruel.

Yitzchak did not despair, however. He bided his time, waiting for the day that he would be able to smell in his son the intoxicating fragrance of a genuine field replete with G-d's blessing. In this way, Yitzchak hoped, he would merit the true fulfillment of his own sacred ambitions. Yitzchak himself had accumulated within his soul a tremendous stock of potential spiritual powers when, bound up on the altar, he willingly bared his neck to his father's knife. He now felt these forces bursting forth from his older son – but to his great sorrow, the field that he saw Esav connecting with was missing G-d's Name and presence! In his conversation with his father, as well, Esav did not mention G-d's Name, while Yaakov frequently did.

Yitzchak calls his son Esav and offers him the longed-for blessing – but on condition that he hunt him some game from the field and *“make it into a tasty dish as I like”* (27,4). Yitzchak clearly did not wish to suffice with food from his home; it must be from the field. For Yitzchak hoped that the blessing that Esav so desired would cause a revolution within his soul, and that his great strengths that until then were focused solely on hunting, would now be refined and turned towards the service of G-d.

Yitzchak also wished to rectify the terrible sin of Nimrod of the previous generation. Nimrod was another great hunter whose powers were directed away from G-dliness and holiness; he actually made himself into a human god! Yitzchak's dream was to “taste” G-d's Name at the hands of his hunter son, and thereby rectify hunter Nimrod's evil.

■ The Voice of Yaakov

When his son comes to him with a delicious meal, accompanied with words of holiness, nobility, and pleasantness, Yitzchak has trouble believing that the change he had so hoped for could have happened so quickly and so deeply. He hears his son saying things like *“Arise, please; sit and eat,”* and *“Hashem your G-d was with me”* (27, 19-20). Such politeness, and certainly the mention of Hashem, was a sharp about-face in Esav's behavior. Yitzchak logically suspects that the “speech” of his son was that of Yaakov. He therefore asks to touch his son - and comes face to face with a sharp and unsettling contradiction:

הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהַיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו.

*The voice is the voice of Yaakov,
and the hands are those of Esav.* (verse 22)

We asked above why Yitzchak, when faced with this contradiction, did not immediately go with the physical evidence of the voice. The answer is that it was not the physical voice that Yitzchak was referring to; it is even likely that both Yaakov's and Esav's voices were very similar! Rather, it was the words that Yaakov said that aroused Yitzchak's suspicions. He was now faced with a dilemma: Could it be that this was Esav standing before him, having made a true spiritual about-face because of his desire to be blessed – or was it Yaakov, who had simply disguised his smooth skin? Over and over again, Yaakov asks his son: “Are you really Esav?”

Adding to the complexities of the situation, Yitzchak wishes to check something else: Where is that wondrous fragrance of old, that aroma of Eden, of a field blessed by G-d? And so he asks his son to come near, at which point, *“Yitzchak smelled the fragrance of his garments and blessed him, and said, ‘See, my son’s fragrance is like that of a field blessed by G-d’”* (verse 27). Precisely at the moment that the intoxicating fragrance of a G-d-blessed field arose from Yaakov's clothing, Yitzchak's blessing to his son burst forth: *“May G-d grant you from the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth, much grain and wine”* (verse 28). Yes: In Yitzchak's eyes, Esav had made a complete turnabout.

■ The Hidden Blessing

But of course it was not Esav. When the real Esav arrived, Yitzchak was shocked to find that everything was the opposite of what he had thought. It was actually Yaakov who had merited the fragrance of the field blessed by G-d and, consequently, the Divine blessings.

Yitzchak has no regrets about giving the blessings to the one whose fragrance is as of a Divinely-blessed field; on the contrary, he says about Yaakov, *“He will also be blessed.”* Why then did he *“tremble greatly”* (verse 33)? It stemmed from his mistake in judgment. He was distressed that he had thought Esav had changed to the point that he was worthy of the blessing.

Esav, for his part, did not notice the powerful upheavals taking place in Yitzchak's soul. He did not even notice that Yitzchak had just blessed Yaakov yet again by saying, *“He will also be blessed.”* Instead, Esav let out a bitter cry:

הַבְּרָכָה אַחַת הוּא לָךְ אָבִי? בְּרַכֵּנִי גַם אֲנִי אָבִי.

Have you only one blessing, my father?

Bless me as well, my father! (verse 38)

To this, Yitzchak responds that in fact, there are no blessings left, for Yaakov has taken them all. But is this true? The blessings granted to Yaakov were all of a materialistic nature: An abundance of food, water, power and sovereignty. What about the spiritual blessings? They still remained to be given!

But Yitzchak did not wish to give these to Esav. The spiritual blessings were a precious treasure that Yitzchak guarded carefully. They are the Blessings of Avraham – the link, oath and covenant between G-d and Avraham's descendants. This is the everlasting Covenant of the Inheritance of Eretz Yisrael:

...לְהִיּוֹת לָךְ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְזַרְעָךְ אַחֲרֶיךָ.

...to be your G-d and to your descendants after you. (17,7)

Esav accurately sensed that a hidden blessing still remained, but Yaakov refused to give it to him. He chose instead to bestow it upon Yaakov, the one who merited the “*field blessed by Hashem.*”

This decision became final when Yitzchak heard what Esav said about the birthright: “*First [Yaakov] took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing*” (27,36). Yitzchak now knew that Yaakov had in fact purchased the birthright from Esav, with Esav's full consent. As such, there was nothing to stop the transfer of the inheritance and the blessings from the older son to the younger son, since the older son was no longer the *bechor*, the legal first-born. Yitzchak then calls in Yaakov, who is about to leave the Holy Land, and officially gives him the Blessing of Avraham:

וַיִּתֵּן לָךְ אֶת בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם לָךְ וּלְזַרְעָךְ אֶתְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּךְ אֶת אֶרֶץ מְגֻרְךָ

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְאַבְרָהָם.

May G-d... give you the Blessing of Avraham, to you and your descendants with you, to inherit the land of your residence that

G-d gave Avraham. (28,4-5)

Thus, no blessings were left for Esav; they were all given to Yaakov – some now, and some earlier. We have thus answered all the questions we asked above, except for one: Why did Rivka choose an underhanded way to obtain the blessing for Yaakov?

■ The Yom Kippur Goats

When Rivka sends Yaakov to bring two kid goats for his father's meal, she tells him:

וְעַתָּה בְּנִי שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי לְאֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְצַוָּה אֹתְךָ.

Now my son, hearken to my voice, to that which I charge you. (27,8)

She is clearly not asking or requesting; she is commanding Yaakov to follow her orders; he has no choice in the matter. We may well ask: How can Rivka be so sure of herself, that she is willing to send her son on such a dangerous mission - and to take full responsibility (verse 13) for the consequences?

The answer to this question brings us back to the original prophecy that Rivka heard when she was pregnant with her twin sons. She felt a struggle taking place within her womb, and “*she went to seek a message from G-d*” (25,22). The message she received from Him was clear:

שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנֶךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ
וְלֵאמֹם מְלָאִם יֵאָמֶץ וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר.

*There are two nations in your womb, and two nations will
separate from within you. They will struggle,
and the greater will serve the younger.* (25,23)

Rivka hears clearly that this is not just a run-of-the-mill instance of sibling rivalry. Rather, there will be a historic clash between nations, and *the greater one will serve the younger*.

A careful reading of the verse shows that this prophecy was directed exclusively and directly to her. The Torah emphasizes that G-d said it **to her**, making clear that Rivka is the sole addressee – and that **she therefore has a crucial role to play in bringing the prophecy to fruition**. She understands that it will be up to her to ensure that it is fulfilled, and that the younger son truly becomes a “*master over [his] brothers*” (27,29), despite the resistance of the *bechor*. Of course, the boys were as yet unborn and she could not then know the nature of the differences between them.

It is fascinating to note that just as Rivka is here instructed to play a decisive role in the process leading to Yaakov's inheritance of the Land of Israel, so too, the Matriarch Sarah played a similar role in ensuring that Yitzchak, and not Yishmael, would inherit the Land. She did so by having Hagar and Yishmael banished from the household in which Yitzchak was growing up.

For Rivka, the critical moment came when she heard Yitzchak speaking to Esav and preparing him for the blessing. She realized that Yitzchak had no doubts; he was convinced that Esav, not Yaakov, was worthy of the blessing and should receive it. As of that moment, she knew she had to bring about a situation in which doubts would arise in his mind – and then he would have no choice but to allow the final decision to be made by G-d.

How should Rivka go about raising doubts for Yitzchak? By removing the differences between the two brothers, leaving Yitzchak to wonder who is who, and who is really deserving of the blessing. The first thing she does, therefore, is to blur their physical differences as much as she can. This will not be simple, given the fact that one is hairy and the other one is smooth-skinned. But Esav's *"best garments, which she had in her keeping"* (27,15) provided the means; she had Yaakov wear them, and also put *"young goats' skins on his arms."* (verse 16)

We may marvel at her willingness to take such a great responsibility upon herself – but she knew that what was at stake here was not just a personal blessing for her beloved son Yaakov. She knew that Yaakov was actually the G-d-chosen, future representative of His nation, and that this was a historic situation in which she had no choice but to act to ensure the Divinely-chosen course of history, as she had been charged.

■ The Yom Kippur Parallel

Where else do we have a situation in which Hashem is presented with two identical objects so that He can decide between them? The answer is the Holy Temple atonement service on Yom Kippur. Commenting on the verse in which Rivka told Yaakov to *"take two choice young goats"* (27,9), the Zohar teaches:

R. Yehuda said: "This is an allusion to the fact that Yaakov's children will, in the future, sacrifice two goats on Yom Kippur – one for G-d, and one for Azazel."

The Mishna (Yoma, chapter 6) says that these two goats must be "equal in appearance, height, and monetary worth, and they must be acquired together." Why? The Torah commands the High Priest to conduct a small lottery in order to know which of the two goats will be a sacrifice for Hashem and which will be thrown to its death at Azazel. Since we do not know the outcome of the lottery, both of them must be identical and equally worthy of being offered to Hashem.

Let us study this more carefully. We know that the two goats are destined for diametrically opposed fates. One of them will be offered on the altar in the Holy Temple in holiness and purity, and its blood will be sprinkled in the Holy of Holies – while the other one will be banished to the cliffs of the Judean Mountains, where it will be dashed to pieces in the gorge below.

Despite this 180-degree difference, we have no way of knowing beforehand which is to be which. Our mortal eyes can see no difference between them. We leave the determination of their fates in the hands of G-d, Who will utilize what appears to us to be a random lottery to inform us of His decision.

The parallel between the brothers Yaakov and Esav and the two Yom Kippur goats is astonishing. Rivka remembered, from the past, the prophetic message that told her that *the greater one will serve the younger*. It was determined before they were born, and certainly before their personalities and traits were known, which son was to serve whom. Hashem had made the decision long before, but Yitzchak does not know the results – and now Hashem is to reveal His decision to him. **Rivka's plan has worked.**

■ The Good and the Bad

The two totally identical goats are symbolic of good and evil in the world. Very often, good and evil are as indistinguishable as Siamese twins; only those with the sharpest of ethical eyes can see the differences. The first example of this was the Tree of Knowledge back in the Garden of Eden. Chava, the first woman, studies the tree from all angles and cannot understand why it should be forbidden:

וַיִּרְאָה הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל וְכִי תָאוֹה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂכִּיל...

She saw that the tree was good to eat, and attractive to the eyes, and favorable by which to gain intelligence... (B'reshit 3,6)

The forbidden tree appeared to be good, so why was it forbidden? Only because of the Divine decree; G-d, not man, makes the decision. It is like a Divine lottery, which guides us when we cannot trust our own powers of discrimination.

A second example wherein good and bad appear to be hard to differentiate is found in the beastly phenomenon of the Nazis. Though their evil was unprecedented in history, it was accompanied by a very high level of philosophy, poetry, and efficiency that, for several years, presented to the world a totally misleading face of Germany.

■ The Lottery and the Sense of Smell

The Prophet Yeshayahu paints a picture of the greatness of the Mashiach by describing some of his unique qualities. The Messiah will be able to discern who is a righteous person and who is not. How will he do this? Surprisingly, via his sense of smell:

וְהָרִיחוּ בִּירְאָתוֹ ה' וְלֹא לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפּוֹט וְלֹא לְמִשְׁמַע אָזְנוֹ יוֹכִיחַ.

*He will have fear of G-d in his sense of smell; not by what he sees
will he judge, nor will he rebuke by what he hears.* (Yeshayahu 11,3)

The Mashiach will specifically not use the customary tools – sight and hearing – to judge. Instead, the chosen sense will be that of smell, which is many times more precise than the other senses. Clearly, one who can “smell out” what is right and wrong is on a very high spiritual level.

This is precisely what happened to Yitzchak Avinu when he wished to bless his son. He was unable to rely on his regular senses, because they gave conflicting information: “*The hands are those of Esav and the voice is that of Yaakov.*” For Yitzchak, his two sons were standing before him just like two identical kid goats that cannot be told apart.

The two thus symbolize the classic struggle between good and bad, which can be determined only by a supernatural “lottery.” Hashem will have to decide who is worthy of the Divine blessing and of being the next link in the chain of Avraham Avinu. This is the moment at which Yitzchak asks the son standing before him to come near so that he can kiss him. At this moment, Yitzchak is informed of the Divine choice – via the wondrous fragrance of the Garden of Eden that arises from Yaakov. Yitzchak then knows: “*This is the son I am to bless!*”

And thus, the winding road reaches its destination, and the worthy son receives the Divine blessing.

