

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Toldot:*** **Genesis 27:1-29**
 Haftarah: **Malachi 1:13-14**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 9:10-13**

The voice is Ya'akov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav.

[Genesis 27:22]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 107:21-30;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #3, *S'lach* [The Prayer for Forgiveness]

Vayehi ki-zaken Yitzchak – And it came to pass, when Yitzchak got grey-headed ... *vayikra et-Esav beno ha-gadol* - then he called his oldest son, Esav ... *tevareicheicha nafshi beteirem amut* – my soul will bless you before I die. **Genesis 27:1, 4.**

Yitzchak is maturing in situational awareness. One element of that is *mortality consciousness*. He was sixty years old when Ya'akov and Esav were born, and that was a few decades ago – so he has to suspect that he is well-past the mid-point of life-in-the-physical-body. He realizes that he is not going to be the Kingdom's point man of strategic counterbalance forever. He is not quite ready for a deathbed – but he seems to be losing little bits of himself with every season. He could last a few more years, or he could die tomorrow - how was he to know which it was to be? As part of his covenant responsibility, therefore, he is beginning to think cross-generationally. He is asking himself questions like “*who can I trust to take care of Rivkah in her old age – and lay her to rest with the dignity she deserves?*”, and “*what is the best way to prepare each of my very different sons for [a] life without me as a real and present guiding force, and [b] the great covenantal destiny the Holy One has ordained for him?*”

Alas, the Covenant does not come with an exemption from trauma, drama, difficult decisions, or pain. There is no such thing as a ‘patriarchal privilege’. There is no ‘get out of old age free’ card.

When Eyes Grow Dim

One of the ‘little bits of Yitzchak’ that he lost over the years was the precious gift of sight. We are not told why, but he found himself stone-cold blind. Perhaps it was cataracts, or glaucoma, or macular degeneration. Perhaps, as one midrash suggests, it was from exposure to the toxic smoke of the incense that was continually being offered by Esav's Kena'ani wives and concubines to their idols.

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Perhaps, as another midrash states, it was a delayed reaction his eyes had to the tears the angels shed over him as he lay on the altar during the Akeida. Whatever the cause, the vision-deprivation was quite a loss. Gone forever was the pleasure of gazing in awe at sunsets; of staring in wonder at rainbows; of watching cloud formations that look like angel hordes riding across the sky. Never again, for Yitzchak, would there be any time spent walking alone, meditating in the fields. Never again would he experience the breathtaking beauty of the flowers of spring. Never again would he marvel at a waterfall, or a flowing river, a seascape of cresting waves, or a majestic mountain peak. Never again would he marvel at the colors of the autumn leaves, take delight in Rivkah's movements and facial expressions, or share a laugh with his sons at the awkward first steps of lambs, kids, calves, or fawns. He would never again be overwhelmed by the stunning beauty of Creation. Never again would he read a man or an animal's body language; or smile knowingly at a story-teller's gesturing. Never again would he take a measurement. Never again would he write in a journal. Never again would he read even so much as a road sign. Never again would he enjoy the soul-awakening reverie of personal Torah study. All he would ever see again was darkness. Selah!

What caused Yitzchak to slip into a world without vision? We are not told. We don't need to know how it happened, or when it happened, or how he felt about it. All we need to know is that, by the time of the events we read about in today's aliyah, he could not see. This was hard. But he did not quit. He was not willing, by any means, to just give up and die. He still had multiple decades to live. He still had a sound mind, deft hands, and a strong back. His other senses were still operative. He still had the promises – and the mission-critical assignments - of the Covenant. He still had a significant part to play in the Holy One's Grand Plan for the Redemption of mankind as a species and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and harmony.

Think for a moment, however, of the responsibility, stress, and strain that this had to put on Rivkah. Who do you think had to be Yitzchak's 'eyes'? Who do you think served as his primary caregiver - day in, day out, week after week, month after month, year after year? Who do you think watched over him almost every waking moment? Who do you think he leaned on, every afternoon, when he went out to meditate in the field *b'erev*?

Life is full of challenges. Yitzchak had his; Rivkah had hers. So it is with all human beings, of every age, gender, ethnicity, skin-color, socio-economic class, and household. So it is for you, and so it is for me. No one is exempt. No one's life is easy. No one possesses a level of 'privilege' which anyone else should either feel justified in either envying or decrying. Each of us is accountable to our Maker

for what we do with what we have been given, and how we deal with whatever unique challenges life presents us. How we choose to view and approach those challenges goes a long way toward determining how well we will be able to deal with them – and alas, how much pain we, *and those closest to us*, wind up experiencing in both their throes and aftermath. The Holy One wants us to learn – from the example of the patriarchs – how to, and not to, approach and deal with difficult life challenges. The study of Torah is not a course in systematic theology, you see; it is a course in *basic life skills*. Torah is not an esoteric coursebook on abstract concepts like ethics, morality, social justice, or theological principle; it is a practical overcomer’s manual for real-life human beings trying to successfully navigate the minefields of, and bring the hope of redemption to, a fallen world.

***How Sons and Daughters of the Covenant
Are Not to Deal With the Challenges Encountered
In the Course of Living In a Fallen World***

In the short section of Torah we study today we see the havoc that is wrought when human beings try to deal with serious life challenges in the two worst ways possible: [1] by yielding to the emotions, appetites, urges, drives, and instincts of the flesh (*i.e. using ‘Esavian’ protocol*), and [2] through the enticing machinations of predisposition and pseudo-intellect (*i.e. using ‘old-man Ya’akovian’ protocol*). Those two approaches represent the antithesis of the ‘*Yisrael protocol*’ – *i.e.* the Divinely-guided approach that the Holy One wants His Covenant partners to learn, implement, mature in, administer, and model to the nations. He does not want us reacting in the flesh (*i.e. giving in to fear, anger, offense, outrage, revulsion, lust, greed, or fight-flight*). Neither does He want us pontificating in the pseudo-intellect (*i.e. processing whatever we see, hear, or feel either through a filter of philosophy, ideology, political theory, and/or religious dogma or halakah, or through a lens of egocentricity, ethnicity-bias, gender-bias, age-bias, national-bias, culture-bias, or generation-think*). There is way too much of both in the world already; we are here to offset that, by building a counterculture of wisdom and of understanding, of counsel and of strength, and of intimate knowledge of and humble reverence for the Holy One. He wants to train us to take a step back and let Him show us the situation and challenge we are facing through His eyes of trans-generational vision and with his mindset of redemption. He wants us to wait for and *sh’ma* His instructions, then walk those instructions out one step at a time. The Holy One wants us to learn to make our first response to the any and every life challenge the seeking of *His Perspective, His Will, and His Wisdom*. He wants us to process every situation we face in life through the disciplines of: [1] *tefillah* prayer, [2]

hagah-ing and *suwach*-ing meditation protocols²; and [3] *atar*-ing intercession. That is the more excellent way. That is the strategic counterbalance way. Rivkah and Ya'akov – like most of us - are going to have to learn that the hard way.

Let's step back in time, and into Yitzchak's tent, for a few moments. Yitzchak is not on his death bed; he is just sitting up in his tent. He has called Esav to his side. Ya'akov is busy somewhere – probably tending the flocks and herds, since Yitzchak is now disabled and Esav has ... well, let's just say 'other interests'. Where is Rivkah? Where do you think she is? She is right there with Yitzchak, doing what she does, taking care of Yitzchak's every need. Then she hears Yitzchak say to Esav: *V'aseh-li mat'amim ka'asher ahavti v'havi'ah li v'ochailah ba'avur tevarecheicha nafshi beteirem amut* – i.e. *prepare me a tasty dish, the kind I love, and bring it to me to eat. My soul will then bless you before I die.*

Let's re-examine this epic story. And let's not do it through a theological, pseudo-intellectual lens; let's do it *through a father's loving eyes!* What exactly was Yitzchak *thinking*? Was there a method to his madness? What exactly did he mean by saying to Esav: 'that my *soul*' [Hebrew *nefesh*, not *neshama*] may '*bless*' [Hebrew, *barach*] you'? Hebrew fathers bless their children all the time – indeed, at least every *Erev Shabbat*! So what kind of 'blessing' did Yitzchak have in mind this particular day?

Now let us re-examine *through the mother's eyes*. How was Rivkah to respond to what she just heard Yitzchak tell Esav? For that matter, was it her place – or her business – to respond? Was she *offended* [the quint-essential reaction of the flesh to a life challenge] – because she perceived Yitzchak's request for Esav to bring him food as a back-handed insult to her cooking? Was she biased against Esav because she had long ago become Ya'akov's advocate in relation to everything having to do with the family? Was she anxious? Worried? Did she react to what she heard by jumping off into the sea of pseudo-intellectual conjecture? Did she start overthinking what was happening? Did she assign more to Yitzchak's request for a meal, and a desire to impart a blessing to one of his sons, as father's do, than he ever intended? Did she start theorizing, conceptualizing, rationalizing, or jumping to conclusions? Did she start assuming facts not in evidence? Did she deduce that, even though Yitzchak did not use the definite article 'the' – in Hebrew, *ha* - when he spoke, nevertheless what he meant was that he planned to bestow 'THE blessing' - instead of just 'a blessing' on Esav? Did she start imagining worst-case scenarios? Did she revert to her brother Lavan's '*control and manipulation, through deception if necessary*' approach to every situation?

² *Hagah*-ing protocols, involving intentional, extensive, and disciplined meditation on Torah, are described in Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 19, and Psalm 119. *Suwach*-ing protocols, involving walking in Creation, connecting and conversing conversationally with the Creator while admiring His Creation, are referenced in Genesis 24:63

The question on Rivkah's mind suddenly became '*when Yitzchak dies, what of his heritage will pass to which of his sons?*'. Perhaps she was unaware – or had forgotten – how Avraham, who actually had seven sons other than Yitzchak³, had handled this life challenge. Torah tells us that, well before he died, Avraham took care of the 'inheritance' issue by giving to the seven other sons '*gifts*' [Hebrew *matanot*, in this context almost certainly meaning stewardship allotments, and probably gold, silver, and other physical assets sufficient for each of them to live and prosper on their own, independent of him], and sending them away to a foreign country to start their own families and businesses. **Genesis 25:4**. In regard to Yitzchak, however, Torah tells us that Avraham gave *et-kol asher lo* – i.e. everything that was of himself. **Genesis 25:5**. In other words, Avraham's dispositional plan was a well thought out, multi-step process, designed to [a] acknowledge the Holy One's choice of his successor, and [b] take care of all sons' material needs, yet still [c] preserve that which was unique to the Covenant for Yitzchak – the son the Holy One had named as his Successor in the Great Kingdom Counterculture Building Enterprise.

Yitzchak knew what Avraham had done. Did Rivkah not? Did Rivkah not understand that this is how it works with men of the Covenant? Did she see him as a vulnerable old fool? Did she see him as being blind spiritually as well as physically? Did she fear that Yitzchak would act on impulse, and do something foolish – to Ya'akov's disadvantage? Did she let her mind and imagination get away from her? Did she misconstrue Yitzchak's intentions with regard to the 'blessing' he intended to give to Esav? Did she even consider – much less discuss with – Yitzchak whether perhaps what Yitzchak intended to do with Esav was what Avraham had done with Yish'mael and the six sons of Keturah – i.e. give him *matanot*, and send him away to start his own life? Is it possible that, by having Ya'akov surreptitiously 'steal' the blessing that Yitzchak intended for Esav, what she really got for him was the 'six sons of Keturah' blessing – and to be sent away, to start life on his own? Did she start getting all pseudo-intellectual, and let her mind wander from the Covenant Plan, and the Will of the Holy One, to ideas about abstract concepts like 'birthright' and 'blessing'?

The point of these questions is not to impugn or insult Rivkah. It is, instead, to point out that sometimes, in the ancient world of patriarchs and matriarchs as well as in our modern world of progeny and prodigals, there is a lot more going on in our heads and in our hearts than appears on the surface.

³ Avraham sired Yish'mael through the arranged surrogacy of Hagar; then, after Sarah died, the patriarch sired six more sons through a woman Torah identifies as '*Keturah*'.

Musings About ‘Birthright’ [Bechorah] and ‘Blessing’ [Beracha]

Early this week the narrative introduced us to what many have come to call the ‘birthright’ [Hebrew *ha-bechorah*] – i.e. what a young Ya’akov ‘purchased’ from Esav for a *bowl of red, red ‘stuff’*. This is basically the primary *bloodline-representing* and *Kingdom torch-carrying privilege* – with all the associated responsibilities and accountability that attach to those privileges. Today’s aliyah introduces us to something else - something that many have come to call the ‘blessing’ [Hebrew *ha-beracha*]. While these concepts are admittedly susceptible to a lot of pseudo-intellectual pontification, if we do not have some understanding what these things are, and the difference between them, we may find it difficult to understand what motivated Rivkah to do what she did. So, let’s wander off into the realm of pseudo-intellect just for a few moments – before we come back to where the rubber meets the road, the ivory towers dissolve, and life gets frighteningly real. Before we do, however, just keep in mind Yeshua’s response to the man who tried to involve him in a dispute over who, among two brothers, should inherit what. When a man *called out to Him, “Rabbi, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!”*, Yeshua’s reply was: *Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you? ... Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.* Luke 12:13-15. Be careful now Rivkah – you are about to wade off into an area where even Mashiach was loath to tread. Is this really a hill you are willing to die on? But HERE WE GO! A *beracha* – i.e. ‘blessing’ - is a primarily physical matter. It is the substance of that stuff which a father can bequeath to his son or daughter, and consists of temporal things in and of this physical world. Most common among these things are rights of possession and/or inheritance in relation to land; rights of pasturage and watering with respect to flocks and herds, gold and silver, and the like. A *bechorah*, or ‘birthright’, on the other hand, is something that is not subject to the will of a person’s father or mother. The term *bechorah* is a legal term from the ancient jurisprudence of covenant interpretation and enforcement. A perpetual covenant [in Hebrew, *b’rit olam*], you see, necessarily must make provision for something the law calls ‘succession’. The right of a successor to the original covenant partner to be placed in the stead of the original covenant partner when the original covenant partner dies [called the *right of succession*] is called the *bechorah*. The *bechorah* is ultimately a matter of Divine Choice, not human will. The retiring partner in covenant may make suggestions regarding a successor, but the remaining partner in covenant does not have to accept the suggestion. The right of succession to the covenant does not necessarily – is not legally required – to go to the firstborn⁴.

⁴ The *bechorah* did not therefore go to Yish’mael, the firstborn of Avraham, but to Yitzchak. Similarly, the *bechorah* did not go to Reuven, the firstborn of Ya’akov, but to Y’hudah [and, in some sense, to Yosef].

Bechorah has to do with the *method or protocol for determining who will take over the covenant rights and responsibilities of a deceased or otherwise displaced covenant partner*. Because *bechorah* consists primarily of spiritual, rather than physical, essence, it must ultimately be determined, accepted, and approved by *the remaining partner in the covenant relationship*. If the remaining covenant partner does not determine, accept, and approve a successor, the covenant is over.

Let's use the *b'rit olam* between the Holy One and Avraham [spelled out in Genesis 15 and 17] as our example for studying out the distinction between *beracha* [blessing] and *bechorah* [birthright]. We all know that Avraham was blessed of the Holy One. He was, in fact, very, very rich. He had herds, flocks, and extensive water and pasturage rights in the land of Kena'an. He had gold and silver galore, and personal possessions beyond counting. Some of this he gave to Yish'mael, and some to the sons born to Keturah after Sarah's death, but most of this he gave [via *beracha*] to Yitzchak. We also all know that Avraham had a covenant with God – a perpetual covenant, the purpose of which was that all the nations of the earth would be blessed, and the primary parts of which were that:

[a] The Holy One would give Avraham abundant, fruitful trans-generational seed [progeny];

[b] The Holy One would entrust the land of the Kena'ani to Avraham's seed in perpetual stewardship;

[c] Avraham would teach his children and his household after him to follow the Way of the Holy One, and build a counterculture on earth to model *tzedakah u'mishpat*,

[d] Avraham would circumcise every male child born in his household on the 8th day of the child's life.

The *bechorah* [birthright] – the rights to succession under this covenant - was something *the Holy One*, not Avraham or Yitzchak - got to decide. *The Holy One*, not any man or woman, reserved the right to make the choice as to which of Yitzchak's sons would succeed Yitzchak as His partner in this covenant. That right was independent of all material things except the title to the field and the cave of Machpelah. The Holy One made the choice of who would receive that title – and who would be buried in that cave – *before either of the boys were born*.

The Two Candidates – And Their Very Different Worldviews

The two obvious choices to carry on the pact between the Holy One and Avraham – his twin grandsons - are as different as *darkness and light*, as separate as the

The same can be said concerning David, who was not the firstborn of Yesha [Jesse], yet received the *bechorah*, and of Shlomo, who was not the firstborn of David, yet received the *bechorah*.

waters above and the waters below, and as distinct of personality and purpose as the *dry land and the gathered seas*. The two, though twins by birth, are *oil and water, salt and snail*. The sages refer to them as *aish v'kash* - '*fire and straw*'.

1. In This Corner: Esav

In one corner is *Esav*. He is ruddy, ruggedly good-looking, hairy, and impulsive. Strong as a bull, he is a man of the field - highly skilled as a hunter and a fierce as a warrior. A self-made 'man's man', he has learned to use his ample muscle and well-honed physical skills to excel in whatever he does. But *Esav's* 'default' tendency is to look at *human beings* – including his own family members, and time, and his father's God for that matter - primarily as obstacles standing between him and whatever he wants. *Esav* is predisposed to see life as *all about the hunt*, the *chase*, and the *thrill of the conquest*. So as soon as he gets something he thinks he wants, it immediately loses the capacity to excite him. As soon as the thrill is gone he tosses whatever he has acquired, conquered, won, or taken from someone else aside. He is quickly off on a new lust adventure, in search of something else – something bigger, something more *challenging*, something more *exciting*, something more *thrilling*. *Esav* is thus the ultimate bondservant to the *thrill of the chase*, to the *sensuousness of the quest*, and to the *passion of the drama*.

He is the one whose appetite for '*that red, red stuff*' has enslaved him. **Genesis 25:30**. He is the one who '*ate, and drank, and went his way*' and thus '*despised his birthright*'. **Genesis 25:34**. *Esav* is voracious in appetite and unrelenting in pursuit of whatever fleshly thing his natural urges call his attention toward. To him females are just 'things' – *objects after which he can lust*. They are mere *targets of his desire for conquest and domination*. A lusty sensualist, he frolics with two of the daughters of the sons of Chet simultaneously, oblivious to the consternation and potential social conflicts this causes for Yitzchak and Rivkah. **Genesis 26:34-35**. It is Yitzchak and Rivkah, of course, who have to deal with the wrath of the sons of Chet when *Esav* hurts one of their daughters' feelings and the drama breaks out – as it inevitably does.

Alas, men like *Esav*, though occasionally appearing very sentimental on a surface level, can never truly love or be loyal to either the Creator or to any other human being. Such people can have pets, but not relationships. Such people process everyone and everything that comes within their sphere of influence through the lens of gratification. Nothing and no one can stand up against their insatiable urges and appetites for any significant period of time. At essence, you see, *Esav* is a 'taker'. Even when he seems to give something to someone else – like the savory food he will bring to Yitzchak in today's aliyah - he does so with a selfish motive. He only gives in order to get something back. Do you know anyone like that? Alas, such people are among men most miserable – and they tend to make

everyone around them most miserable as well. Such men, you see, can never feel the blessed joy of gratitude – for they are never at peace, never satisfied. Nor can such men ever be content with the Holy One’s Will for their lives. They can never trust the Holy One for anything important, because they want what they want when they want it, how they want it, and become enraged quickly when everything does not go according to the way they imagine it should be.

The Holy One – like Yitzchak - loves Esav. Neither will ever give up on him. But Esav seldom stops pursuing his lusts and appetites long enough to respond in any meaningful way to either father figure’s Silent Pursuit or Watchful Care. For Esav, you see, his father and his Creator are useful only for one thing - what Esav can *get from them*. Esav sees men, women, children, situations, relationships, and the Holy One, *only through the eyes, lusts, and sentiments of the flesh*.

Unfortunately, there is *a little of Esav in all of us*. It is this part of us – the ‘Esav quality’ - that the world around us knows exactly how to exploit and manipulate to its advantage. The Esav that lives in us therefore always winds up enslaved – if not by outrage, offense and drama, by over-indulgence, addictive behaviors, emotion-based ideologies, cheap notions of sentimentalism, and guilt and performance-based elements of religion.

2. And in This Corner: Ya’akov

In the other corner is *Ya’akov*. He is fair-complexioned, handsome, smooth-skinned, meditative, smart as a whip, and the ultimate quick study. Ya’akov is a man of commerce, trade and business, who uses wit, wiles and words with excellence. Unfortunately, Ya’akov’s primary claim to fame at this point in the narrative is that he knows how to cook up an appetizing stew and negotiate a cunning deal. At 40 years old this one still has no wife – or even a prospect of one. Indeed from all appearances this one seems to be on the road toward a ‘failure to launch’ lifestyle hanging around his mother’s tent. One day he will be Yisrael – but that day is not here yet. He is every bit as pseudo-intellectually self-justifying as his brother is fleshly emotion obsessed. At least, unlike his lusty brother, Ya’akov has thus far been able to keep his hormones in check when face to face with the erotic appeal of the daughters of Kena’an.

Will Yitzchak’s inheritance bypass his firstborn and flow instead to his younger son - the one who was born holding onto Esav’s heel? Ya’akov has been his mother’s favorite, but not so his father’s. As a result Ya’akov has developed a deep longing to somehow earn his father’s attention and affection. That has made him a bit of a *traditionalist* – always trying to connect with his father through *devoting himself to learning* and *following* family traditions. Thus far, it is more about winning his father’s affection away from Esav than it is about truly honoring his

father's mission. He has the traditions of Avraham and Yitzchak down pat – but alas he does not yet have the passion for and intimate relationship with the Creator that make the traditions meaningful on anything more than a sentimental basis. The smaller and weaker of the twins, Ya'akov has had to learn the hard way to out-think and out-maneuver his larger, stronger, more physical antagonist. He knows the pain Esav is capable of inflicting better than anyone in the world. He now knows exactly what triggers Esav's rage, what stirs his shallow sentimentality, and what calms his savage beast. Struggle by struggle, encounter by encounter, wound by wound, dramatic episode by dramatic episode, Ya'akov has been learning strategies and techniques for dealing with Esav and those of his ilk. As a result Ya'akov is no longer intimidated – much less overwhelmed - by Esav's vastly superior size, physical strength, and bluster. Ya'akov has learned how to play a very satisfactory *David* to Esav's best *Goliath*. Perhaps, with a lot of training, Ya'akov may even prove capable of playing a functional *Esther* to Esav's best *Haman* and a passable *Yehudah Maccabee* to Esav's best *Antiochus Epiphanes*. Ya'akov has learned – as have his descendants in every generation since - that no matter how big and loud and demanding Esav may be, he will never be anything more than an antithesis – a foil. He will prosper for a while, but he will eventually implode upon himself and everyone around him. He will not prevail. He will wind up being just another pawn in the Mighty Hand of the Holy One. Esav can jostle and scorn and wound and even maim Ya'akov - but he can never overcome him. Unless, of course, Ya'akov forgets his true identity and or starts thinking like, dressing up to look like, lusting, and/or blustering like his brother.

How about you, Beloved - are *you* learning how to handle the darker sentiments and moods of the Esavs the Holy One has allowed in your life – or the seed of Esav that exists in you?

***Is It Really the Appointed Time of the Holy One
to Push the Envelope On the Inheritance Issue?***

After four full decades of life neither of the young men in Yitzchak and Rivkah's household have shown a whole lot in the way of merit thus far. Though raised in a home of Covenant-keepers and being the beneficiaries of the amazing blessings from the Holy One, neither of them has ever even had a God-encounter - much less heard and responded to a ***Lech Lecha*** calling from the Throne of Heaven. Neither has left anything of value for the sake of the Covenant. Neither is presently engaging in a Divine Adventure with the Invisible Shepherd their father and grandfather knew so well. Neither of them has been described thus far as 'walking with the Holy One'. Neither of them has been described thus far as keeping *the way of the Holy One* or *doing righteousness and justice*. In fact, neither of the young men has thus far been described by Torah as anything close to 'righteous'.

We have not once seen either Ya'akov or Esav *meditating* [Hebrew *suwach*-ing] or *interceding* [Hebrew *atar*-ing] like their father did. Neither have we seen either of them *inquiring* [Hebrew *darash*-ing] *of the Holy One* like their mother did. Indeed, the plain truth of the matter is that we have not seen either of these 40-year-old young men doing anything whatever that leads to believe they have a spiritual life – or an active relationship with their Creator - of any kind. Will one of these two really receive the inheritance of the most blessed man and woman on the planet?

And of What Exactly Does Yitzchak's Inheritance Consist Anyway?

What heritage will Yitzchak leave? Oh there are material possessions galore. There is silver and gold and precious garments and metals from Egypt and Gerar. There are herdsmen, menservants and maidservants. There are great flocks and herds that their grandfather started and their father and mother increased. There are invaluable watering rights to wells their grandfather dug and their father reopened. There are extensive rights of pasturage that their grandfather and father negotiated with the Hittites and the Ph'lishtim. Most importantly, there is the field and cave near Hebron that Avraham purchased from the sons of Chet for 400 shekels of silver – the place where the bodily remains of Avraham and Sarah lie interred.

If we have learned anything thus far in our study of Torah, however, it is that material things are nowhere near the most important things in life. The inheritance of Yitzchak, son of Avraham and Sarah, heir to the Covenant Promises of the Creator of Heaven and Earth, is surely more than material possessions. The Holy One had promised Avraham that He would bring forth out of Avraham's loins a great nation, and that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. **Genesis 12:2-3**. The Creator had promised Avraham that his seed would be as beyond numbering as the grains of dust on the earth [**Genesis 13:16**] and the stars in the Heavens [**Genesis 15:5**]. The Holy One had promised that Avraham's and Yitzchak's seed would be given not just rights of grazing and watering and burial but full eternal rights of possession and inheritance over all the land the world had theretofore known as the land of Kena'an. See **Genesis 13:15, 15:6 & 18-21, etc.**

Will one of these two lads really be the chosen vessel of the Holy One to carry those promises forward toward fruition? If so, does Yitzchak really have any say in which of the two sons that is? And wait a minute – is Yitzchak going somewhere? We who know Torah know that he is only about 80 years old, and is going to live several more years, and not die until he is 'old and full of years'. **Genesis 35:29**. So why all of a sudden is Torah focusing everyone's attention so intently upon what will happen when Yitzchak is gone? Is something about to happen that will dramatically affect the inheritance that Yitzchak will pass on to the next generation? You bet it is, Dear Reader.

It's a Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall!

As we discussed earlier in the week the essence of the week's studies is summed up in the phrase 'the *toldot* of Yitzchak'. As we have seen, the phrase '*the toldot of Yitzchak*' refers to much more than to genealogy. The phrase '*the toldot of Yitzchak*' references *the sum total of who Yitzchak was*. It incorporates *every purpose under Heaven for which Yitzchak was given the breath of life*. It points to *all the trials and tribulations, all the God-encounters, and all the Divinely ordained life experiences through which Yitzchak as the chosen seed of Avraham, was pushed* by the sheer force of the covenant the Holy One made with his father. For as we discussed in the introductory *shiur* to this parsha, the sages say that whenever a person's life is full of inner meaning, even the accounts and chronicles of that person's life and the long-lasting effects of his or her interactions - with the Holy One, with fellow men, and with Creation - are so powerful that they can serve as sources of *inspiration* and *revelation* for all who live thereafter.

Yitzchak's life up to this point has been a mixed bag of sorts. He was born as a child of promise, a supernatural gift into a household of great means. He was raised in a Godly heritage. He has for a wife a true *ishet Chayil* [a woman of strength and virtue], whom he loves and from whom he draws great comfort. By the blessing of the Holy One he has greatly prospered, even beyond his father, even while the people around him were experiencing horrific draught and famine. He has two strong, healthy sons. But he has also seen and been the target of much trouble. He was hated and mocked in his formative years as a child by his older half-brother Yish'mael. He felt the cold flint knife pressed against his neck and stared death in the face at Mount Moriyah. He lost his mother unexpectedly in his 40th year.

Yitzchak suffered with his beloved bride through 20 years of barrenness. He experienced famine and had to migrate from his ancestral home just to survive. He became the first of our patriarchs to experience the cruel anti-Semitism that would be unleashed upon the descendants of his son Ya'akov generation after generation, century after century, millennium after millennium, until Messiah comes in His glory. But Yitzchak has not only *survived all these things* through the covenant faithfulness of the Holy One his God, he has greatly prospered through them. And he has *managed to stay above bitterness and hatred*. He has truly *re-opened the wells of living water that his father Avraham dug* - in the *spiritual realm* as well as the *physical*. So as the curtain rises on today's aliyah, if you are like me, you feel a poignant sense of sadness when you read that Yitzchak - Avraham and Sarah's miracle child - the child of promise in whom all the fullness of the blessing of the Holy One for mankind resides, is now in many ways only a shadow of the man at whose sight Rivkah fell off of her camel.

Dealing With It!

So ... how are we supposed to cope with the ravages of time on our physical bodies? How are we supposed to honor the Holy One – or fulfill our Divine destiny and purpose and life - when strength ebbs from our eyes, our ears, our limbs, our hearts, and even our minds? What can we learn from Yitzchak about these things?

The first thing we can glean from Yitzchak is that *he kept looking for ways to find joy in life*. He was blind, hence he could not hunt as he apparently once did. But he did not let that stop him. Torah tells us he called Esav, and said to him:

V'atah sa-na cheleicha telyeicha v'kashteicha

Now take your gear, your dangler and bow,

veitze ha-sadeh v'tzudah li tza'id

and go out in the field to trap me some game.

Va'aseh-li mat'amim ka'asher ahavti

Make it into a tasty dish, such as I love

V'havi'ah li v'ocheilah ba'avur

and bring it to me to eat.

tevareicheicha nafshi beterem amut

My soul will then bless you before I die.'

[Genesis 27:3-4]

Did you catch that last phrase: 'My soul will then bless you ... **BEFORE I DIE?**' So ... it is actually *Yitzchak* who is pushing the envelope on the inheritance issue. Rivkah, Esav, and Ya'akov are not the *initiators* of the narrative that follows – they are merely going to be reacting to a process *Yitzchak* has started in motion with the words of his mouth.

Words are powerful, aren't they? Words can start a chain reaction that either *heals* a family or *devastates* it. I will leave it to your imagination to decide which it will be in this case. And I will leave it to you and the Holy One to decide which effect the words of your mouth will have on your family and other spheres of influence.

Of Fathers and Sons

Long ago *Yitzchak* had made a choice to love his unlovable son *Esav* with an unrelenting love. *Esav* was a handful alright - but he was *his* handful. He had prayed for his beloved *Rivkah* to have a child through 20 long years of barrenness, and *Esav* was the firstfruit of his prayers. Would he pray the prayer and then reject the answer to it? No. He had been given two sons. He knew full well that the one who needed him most was the most troublesome one – the one his mother simply could not handle. And so despite all the trouble *Esav* brought into the household over the years, *Yitzchak* kept loving him the way only a father can love a prodigal.

He made the choice to absorb the blows of Esav's impetuosity. He trusted the Holy One to turn Esav's prodigal soul into '*prey in his mouth*'. Now, as he sensed his own health beginning to fail, Yitzchak decided to cast a final snare aimed at awakening and redeeming his rough-and-tumble son's dark soul. Yitzchak knew, you see, that underneath Esav's crude and boisterous exterior there beat the heart of a tenderhearted little boy – a waif who, more than anything, secretly craves the affection, approval, and blessing of his father.

Yitzchak was a devoted husband of one wife who modeled for his household meditation and passionate prayer; Esav was not like him at all in these important particulars. Esav was a man of violent passions who liked to carouse with multiple Kena'ani women at night and occupy his days with trapping and killing things and boasting about it. The two men did not share much in likes and dislikes, but they had one area of very clear agreement. And it was on that area of agreement that Yitzchak chose to focus. Yitzchak called Esav to his tent and commissioned him to go hunting and to bring him a meal of '*flavorful meat, such as I love*'. This was one area of commonality between the father and his son.

Perhaps one of the lessons Torah is trying to teach us is that one key to aging with dignity is never to let age and diminishing skills or resources make us quit seeking the pleasure of the company of either *the people we love most* or *the blessings of life that have had always had the capacity to bring us joy*.

Secondly, Yitzchak's story teaches us that whatever limitations age may place upon us, as long as we can *think* and *speak*, we can still be a fountain of blessing to others – including those upon whom we are dependent. Yitzchak not only wants to enjoy savory dishes of venison – he wants to be strengthened by same so he can *bless* Esav with a life-changing blessing. Yitzchak knows that the blessing he has to offer Esav is worth more a hundred times the effort, energy, and time Esav will spend in the endeavor. In other words, a *key to aging with dignity* is to focus not on what we cannot do, or what limitations our physical condition foists upon us, but upon what we can give to others. Perhaps all we can give is a kind word, or a friendly smile, a different perspective, a piece of sage advice, or a gentle rebuke. But as long as we have breath, not only can we bless the Holy One - we can also bless the people around us.

As the narrative continues look for other ways Yitzchak's words and actions teach us how to grow old gracefully⁵. There is no question that Yitzchak was, at the time

⁵ Keep in mind the admonition of Kohelet [the 'Preacher'] in the final chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes: *Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them" *** Fear the Holy One and treasure and keep watch*

of the events about which we are reading, far beyond his ‘prime’, and by no means ‘on top of his game’ – physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. And yet, please note that he is going to be the only one of the characters in the drama that is about to unfold that is going to come out of this episode with his dignity intact. Perhaps there’s more substance to this quiet old man than we have ever taken the time to see before. So do not feel sorry for Yitzchak because he’s old and blind – learn from him! But for now let us consider the other main characters in the compelling drama of which Yitzchak is about to become the star.

Which of the Twins Will Receive What Blessing?

As Yitzchak ponders his life, and the material blessings released upon his life by the Holy One - he decides it is time to bring up the touchy subject of how he will bequeath that with which he has been blessed by the Holy One to one of his sons. What we would *like* to have recorded in the text of Torah at this critical juncture would be another “God encounter” for Yitzchak. We could write it ourselves, couldn’t we? It would go something like the following:

[**Note:** The following is a *literary device* only; it represents not what did happen, but what we, in our presumptuousness, might wish had happened]

*... And Yitzchak atar-ed the Holy One.
He bared his soul before the God of his father,
emptying himself of his own will and desires,
and earnestly seeking direction from the Holy One
as to which of his sons should receive what portions of his blessing.
And the Holy One appeared to Yitzchak, and spoke to him saying:
‘I am the God of your father Avraham,
and I am the source of all blessings you have received,
and of everything that you contemplate passing on to your sons.
Your firstborn, Esav, has despised his birthright,
considering it less valuable than a bowl of bean stew.
He is cavorting with two women of the Kena’anim
who have polluted his mind and heart with idolatry,
which has caused much pain to your beloved wife Rivkah and yourself.
That situation is never going to get any better, because Esav does not want it to.
Therefore, while you may bless Esav with an eldest son’s portion
of the physical wealth I have given you,
it is Ya’akov to whom you should impart the blessing
of the things I promised to your father Avraham.
I am the Holy One, who miraculously caused you to be born
to your father in his old age, and who has preserved you for this moment.
Sh’ma, Yitzchak - and impart blessings to your sons in accordance with My Words.’”*

over His commandments, for this is the whole mission of man. For the Holy One will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Ah, but alas, the Creator's ways are not our ways. No "God encounter" such as we just fantasized about ever occurred. For reasons we cannot entirely know - because we are not told – the Holy One remained totally "silent" on the matter. And so, when Yitzchak decided it was time to start the process of "passing the torch" to his sons, the events which transpired set off shockwaves which still resound – even as war continues between the world empires of Esav against the descendants of Ya'akov who bear the blessing of Yitzchak and have rights of possession of the land of Israel. We might as well get right to it. *Fire and straw*, age after age.

Ya'akov's Descent: Dressing Up In Esav's Clothing And Becoming Like Him in Every Way

In the drama that unveils today our own beloved matriarch, Rivkah, will hatch the most devious deception described in Scripture. Yes, Dear Reader, it is *the mind of a revered saint of the Holy One* which conjures up a plan to "pull the wool over the eyes" of an old blind man - none other than her husband, Yitzchak. And after a few protestations (mostly centering on 'what if I get *caught* ...), our ancestor Ya'akov of blessed memory jumps into the diabolical plan his mother has hatched with both feet. He spins falsehood after falsehood to get what he wants from his disabled father. In the following quotation the questions/inquiries of Yitzchak, who was clearly suspicious, are written in italics; and the blatant fabrications of Ya'akov in response to Yitzchak's questions/inquiries are written in bold print:

"How is it that you have found it [prey] so quickly, my son?"
He said, "**Because the Holy One your God gave me success.**"

*Yitzchak said to Ya'akov, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son,
whether you are really my son Esav or not."*

*Ya'akov went near to Yitzchak his father.
He felt him, and said, "The voice is Ya'akov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav."
He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy,
like his brother, Esav's hands. So he blessed him.*

*He said, "Are you really my son Esav?" He said, "**I am.**"*

Today's aliyah teaches us that there is no one so "holy", so "righteous" that he (or she) is above horrendous and despicable acts – under the "right" set of circumstances. So do not ever get smug and self-righteous, Dear Reader. Tremble at the evil that you and I are capable of, even knowing the Holy One as we do. Tremble, and be humbled before the Holy One, at the realization that each of us is a potential terrorist, a potential slanderer, a potential thief. Have empathy for Ya'akov and Rivkah even as you condemn their blatant duplicitousness.

The Perfume of a Field Blessed by the Holy One

When Ya'akov steps forward and kisses his father, right before Yitzchak decides it is 'okay' to release the *beracha* [KJV 'blessing'], Yitzchak says a very strange thing. Let's read the account as Torah presents it:

Vayigash vayishak-lo

[Ya'akov] approached and kissed him

vayarach et-rei'ach begadav v'yevareicheihu

[Yitzchak] smelled the fragrance of his garments, and blessed him.

vayomer re'eh rei'ach beni kere'ach sadeh

He said, 'See, my son's fragrance is like the perfume of a field

asher b'racho Adonai

blessed by the Holy One

[Genesis 27:27]

What did Yitzchak smell on Ya'akov that he could liken to '*the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One*'? I can assure you it was not a garment of goat hair. Goat hair smells like ... well, let's just say no one would confuse its odor with '*the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One*'!⁶ A popular legend has arisen, therefore, that the 'best garment' of Esav, which Rivkah picked out for Ya'akov to wear, was a *very special* garment. The legend says it is the garment of skin with which the Holy One clothed Adam after the Fall [Genesis 3:21]. The legend says this garment was kept and passed down from Shet [Seth] through Noach through Shem, through Avraham, through Yitzchak, to Esav. The legend says the garment covered all sins, and made the wearer smell *kere'ach sadeh asher b'racho Adonai* - like the perfume of a field blessed by the Holy One'. Ya'akov needed such a garment. And so, of course, do we all.

And This is the Blessing ...

The perfume of the field blessed by the Holy One convinced Yitzchak that it was time to release his blessing, and pass the generational baton to the one standing before him. And so release it he did. Here are the words of his blessing:

Veyiten-lecha ha-Elohim mital ha-shamayim umish'manei ha-aretz

May God grant you the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,

v'rov dagan v'tirosh

much grain and wine.

⁶ R. Yochanan said: "There is no harsher scent than the stench of goats that was on his clothing, yet the text says he *"smells the scent of his clothes and blesses him!"* Rather, when the Patriarch Jacob entered to his father, Gan Eden [the Garden of Eden] entered with him ... And when Esau entered to his father, Gehinom [Hell] entered with him. (Midrash Rabbah 65:22).

Y'avducha amim v'yishtachavu lecha l'umim

Nations will serve you; governments will bow down to you.

heveh gevir l'acheicha v'yishtachavu lecha b'nei imeicha

You will be a lord over your brother; your mother's children will prostrate themselves to you.

orereicha arur umevaracheicha baruch

Those who put limitations on you will be limited, and those who bless you will be blessed.

[Genesis 27:28-29]

Note the elements of this blessing. First of all, there are the three aspects of nature: the ***mital ha shamayim*** [dew of heaven], the ***mishmanei ha-eretz*** [fat of the earth], and the ***rav dagan v tirosh*** [abundant grain and wine]. Second, there is the position of chosen-ness among the goyim – the people groups of the earth. Nations will serve you, and governments will bow down to you. Third, there is *pre-eminence among the Hebrew peoples* - as Ya'akov's brother [Esav] and all his mother's children [all generations descended from Rivkah – through either Ya'akov or Esav] would be subject to him. And finally, as was the case with Avraham, all who would bless Ya'akov would be blessed, and all who cursed Ya'akov would be cursed.

The Great Omission(s)

That is all well and good, and nice and everything – BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LAND? What about the covenant promise of ownership of Eretz Yisrael? And what about the essence of the heritage of Avraham – the heritage of being a blessing to the rest of the world? Ah, Beloved, those things could not be passed on to a deceiver. They would indeed be passed on – but only at the appropriate, appointed time of the Holy One. And Ya'akov has some pretty tough lessons to learn, and some life-changing God-encounters to experience first! The blessing of Yitzchak merely launched him on the Great Adventure.

There are no shortcuts. And dressing up and pretending to be something or someone you are not may fool *people* – *but it does not fool the Holy One.*

Questions For Today's Study

1. As *Yitzchak* [Isaac] prepared to impart a blessing [Hebrew *beracha*] to Esav, *Rivkah* [Rebecca] hastily devised a scheme to make sure the bulk of the *beracha* went to *Ya'akov* [Jacob] instead. Rivkah whispered to Ya'akov:

***"Behold, I heard your father speak to Esav your brother, saying,
'Bring me venison, and make me savory food,
that I may eat, and bless you before the Holy One before my death.'***

***Now therefore, my son, sh'ma my voice
according to that which I direct/enjoin you.***

Go now to the flock and get me from there two good kids of the goats.

I will make them savory food for your father, such as he loves.

You will take it to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death."

*Ya`akov said to Rivkah his mother,
"Behold, Esav my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.
What if my father touches me? I will seem to him as a deceiver,
and I would bring a curse on myself, and not a blessing."
His mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son.
Sh'ma my voice, and go get them for me."*

[A] What exactly was 'at stake' in this passage? Why all the fuss?

[B] What did Yitzchak intend to impart to Esav? [Hint: look ahead to verses 28-29, where Yitzchak imparts to Ya'akov the blessing he intended for Esav].

[C] Is what Yitzchak intended to impart to Esav the "birthright" [Hebrew *bechorah*] which Esav sold for a bowl of "red stuff" a few years previously? Explain your thoughts.

[D] Why do you think Yitzchak asked Esav to go out and hunt game and prepare 'tasty food' that he loved before he would bless him?

[E] What kind of 'curse' was Ya'akov concerned about in verse 12?

[F] In Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Lexicon look up the word that our English Bibles translate as "deceiver" in verse 13. [It is Strong's Hebrew word #8591 *ta`a*, pronounced *taw-ah*] Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings. Then describe the Hebraic word picture that word presents to us.

[G] Why do you think Rivkah was so adamant that Ya'akov, the youngest of the twins, receive Yitzchak's *beracha*?

2. Yitzchak [Isaac], though suspicious that he is being tricked, imparts the blessing of the firstborn upon the one whose voice sounds like Ya'akov [Jacob] but who smells, feels and cooks tasty meat dishes like Esav [Esau].

*He came to his father, and said, "My father?" He said, "Here I am.
Who are you, my son?"*

*Ya`akov said to his father, "I am Esav your firstborn.
I have done what you asked me to do.*

Please arise, sit and eat of my venison, that your soul may bless me."

Yitzchak said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?"

He said, "Because the Holy One your God gave me success."

*Yitzchak said to Ya`akov, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son,
whether you are really my son Esav or not." Ya`akov went near to Yitzchak his father.
He felt him, and said, "The voice is Ya`akov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav."*

*He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy,
like his brother, Esav's hands. So he blessed him.*

He said, "Are you really my son Esav?" He said, "I am."

*He said, "Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison,
that my soul may bless you." He brought it near to him, and he ate.*

He brought him wine, and he drank.

His father Yitzchak said to him, "Come near now, and kiss me, my son."

*He came near, and kissed him. He smelled the smell of his clothing,
and he blessed him, and said, "Behold, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field*

*that the Holy One has blessed. God give you of the dew of the sky,
of the fatness of the eretz, and plenty of grain and new wine.
Let peoples serve you, Nations bow down to you.
Be lord⁷ over your brothers; Let your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you."*

[A] When Yitzchak asks Ya'akov, masquerading as Esav, how he found game so quickly, what was Ya'akov's response? What does this tell you about Ya'akov's spiritual state at the time?

[B] List the elements of the blessing Yitzchak speaks over the one he thinks is Esav. With regard to each phrase, interpret what you think was meant - for instance, what 'the dew of the heavens', the 'fatness of the earth', 'grain' and 'wine' symbolize.

[C] Which parts of the *beracha* [KJV 'blessing'] given at this time relate to the spiritual promises the Holy One made to Avraham?

3. In today's haftarah the Holy One reveals the hidden thoughts of the *kohanim* [priests] who were engaging in public ministry at the time of the prophet Malachi. In their hearts they consider a life of service at the Holy One's altar a "weariness" - a life to "sniff" at.

*You say also, 'Behold, what a weariness it is!' and you have sniffed at it,"
says the Holy One of Hosts;
"and you have brought that which was taken by violence, the lame, and the sick;
thus you bring the offering. "Should I accept this at your hand?" says the Holy One.
"But the deceiver is cursed, who has in his flock a male,
and vows, and sacrifices to the Holy One a blemished thing; for I am a great King,"
says the Holy One of hosts, "and my name is awesome among the nations."*

[A] In verse 13 what does the Holy One to be the inner attitude of the priests' hearts regarding their 'service'?

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the words translated '*weariness*' [Strong's Hebrew word #4972 *mattela'ah*, pronounce *mat-tel-aw-aw*] and '*snuffed*' [KJV] [Strong's Hebrew word #5301, *naphach*, pronounced *naw-fakh*] in verse 13. Write each of the Hebrew words in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, then describe the Hebraic word pictures these words present to us.

[C] How did this *inner heart attitude* of the priests affect the service they offered?

[D] In verse 14 the Holy One pronounces a *curse* [Strong's Hebrew word #779 '*arar*, pronounced *aw-rar*']. On whom is the 'curse' pronounced?

⁷ The word our English Bibles translate as 'lord' in this verse is *g'bir*, *gimel*, *beit*, *yod*, *resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #1376. It refers to a ruler, but literally means 'eclipser', 'surpasser', or 'prevailer' - one who *prevails* or *excels* over another or others. The Hebrew verb root is *gabar*, *gimel*, *beit*, *resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #1396 pronounced *gaw-bar*', a verb meaning "to prevail, have strength, be strong, be powerful, be mighty, be great." The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 7:18, where we are told that the waters [of the Flood] '*prevailed*' [Hebrew, *gabar*] upon the earth.

[E] Note that the one who is cursed is called, in English “the deceiver”. The word is not the same one translated “deceiver” in our Torah reading, in Genesis 27:12 [it is what Ya’akov did not want his father to think he was]. The word used in the haftarah to describe the kohanim under the Holy One’s curse is Strong’s Hebrew word #5230 *nakal*, pronounced *naw-kal*’. What parallels do you see between what *the kohanim* of Malachi’s day were doing and what Ya’akov did in today’s Torah aliyah in order to place himself in a position to obtain something he wanted for himself?

4. In the verses that make up today’s B’rit Chadasha reading Shaul of Tarsus describes the criteria the Holy One did not use in choosing to bless Ya'akov rather than Esav. He says:

*Not only so, but Rivkah also conceived by one, by our father Yitzchak.
For being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad,
that the purpose of the Holy One according to election might stand,
not of works, but of him who calls, it was said to her, "The elder will serve the younger."
Even as it is written, "Ya`akov I loved, but Esav I hated."*

[A] What criteria did the Holy One not consider when deciding whom to bless?

[B] What was the basis for the Holy One’s choice of Ya'akov over Esav?

[C] List what you consider the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ actions and traits of Ya'akov and Esav. Do you consider one of them ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than the other? Explain your answer.

[D] What verses from the TaNaKh is Shaul quoting when he says, ‘Even as it is written, “Ya’akov I loved, but Esav I hated”?’

[E] In Strong’s look up the Greek word that our English Bibles translate as ‘hated’ in the last verse quoted above from Romans 9. Write the Greek word and the definition(s) given to it by Strong’s. In your opinion is this a good translation of the Hebrew phrase ‘*v’et-Esav saneti*’ which is found in Malachi 1:3? [Keep in mind, the same Hebrew verb (*sane*’), is used to describe the way Ya’akov felt about Leah, who was his wife and bore him six children – see Genesis 29:31, 33]

*May all the blessings you are privileged to impart
be distributed according to His Divine plan, not yours or mine.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 107:21-30

*Let them praise the Holy One for his lovingkindness,
For his wonderful works to the children of men!
Let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with singing.*

*Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters;
These see the Holy One's works, and his wonders in the deep.
For he commands, and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up its waves. They mount up to the sky;
they go down again to the depths. Their soul melts away because of trouble.
They reel back and forth, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.
Then they cry to the Holy One in their trouble and he brings them out of their distress.*

*He makes the storm a calm, so that its waves are still.
Then they are glad because it is calm, so he brings them to their desired haven.*