

PRAYER

Why do I pray? – Because prayer invites me to an adventure in human values.

Why do I pray? – Because prayer opens the door that leads to all humankind.

Why do I pray? – Because prayer inspires me to be one with the Parent of the universe.

Why do I pray? – Because I am frail and need strength; I am troubled and need comfort; and being proud, I need humility.

Why do I pray? – Because having entered the world as a Jew by birth, I want to leave it a Jew by worth.

Why do I pray? – Because prayer respects my mind, purifies my heart, exalts my spirit and sanctifies my life.

Why do I pray? – Because prayer leads me out of myself into the broad places where all mortals live, and unto the high places where truth and righteousness abide.

Why do I pray? – Because prayer leads me out of “spiritual poverty.” Just as there is material poverty in food, clothing and shelter; so is there spiritual poverty where the deficiency is in spiritual things such as prayer, knowledge of Torah, observance of the mitzvot, and the practice of good deeds.

*From Morrie Matlof
(adapted)*

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

It is better to deserve without receiving than to receive without deserving.

Robert Ingersoll



November 26, 2011

כט חשוון תשע"ב

מברכים החודש

Parashat Toldot - Genesis 25:19-28:9 (תולדות)

Hertz – p 93 Stone – p 124

Haftarah – I Samuel 20:18-42 (שמואל א')

Hertz – p 94 Stone – p 1207

Kiddush sponsored by Sisterhood

Rabbi Gordon's **Talmud** Class 3:15 PM

Minchah - 4:15 PM **Shabbat Ends** – 5:24 PM

On This Week's Torah Portion - תולדות

The great theme of Parashat Toledot is the blessing (*b'rachah*) and the birthright (*b'chorah*). The words are anagrams in Hebrew, indicating that there is a strong link between them. The great question surrounding both is: to which of Yitzchak's sons do they belong, and why do Yitzchak and Rivka disagree about their disposition?

Torah tells us that Esau and Ya'akov are twins. From a relatively early age however (15, according to the traditional chronology) they display very different characteristics. Esau's entire focus was material life; grasping as much as he could with his hands, the part of the body with which he is commonly associated. This grasping knew no boundaries – he simply took what he wanted with little or no consideration for the niceties of the law.

Ya'akov on the other hand focuses on the spiritual aspect of life. He is described by Torah as a "simple man, dwelling in tents" – simple meaning truthful, straightforward, dwelling in the inner values of life. His prime motivation is serving Gd, primarily through the medium of Truth.

This is the reason that Ya'akov was eager to acquire the *b'chorah* from Esau. The *b'chorah* was primarily a spiritual primacy, not a material one. It included in its purview the responsibility for the sacrificial service and the spiritual leadership of the family that came along with it. We know that the *b'chorah* is not primarily material, because if it were Esau would never have traded it for some lentil stew! Rather Esau "despises" the birthright simply because it is of no worth to him – it distracts him from grabbing more "stuff" for himself.

The great question then becomes, why did Yitzchak love Esau and wish to give him the parental blessing? It would appear on the surface that a spiritual blessing would be lost on someone as steeped in materialism as Esau. To begin with, we cannot answer that Yitzchak was unaware of Esau's nature; according to the traditional chronology Esau and Ya'akov were 63 and Yitzchak was 123 at the time of the incident with the blessings. It is also important to note that the blessing that Yitzchak gives the disguised Ya'akov makes no mention of spiritual qualities at all! It is a totally material blessing. It was apparently Yitzchak's intention to feed Esau's craving for the material. Only later on, as Ya'akov is leaving to find a wife in Charan, does Yitzchak give him the spiritual blessing passed on to him from his father Avraham, including the inheritance of the Land of Israel, the prime spiritual real estate in the world.

As we have discussed in previous years, Yitzchak is the archetype of the attribute of *gevurah*, or "strength." It is the opposite, or perhaps better, the complement, of the attribute of *chesed*, "lovingkindness" represented by Avraham. It is the attribute that takes the overwhelming flow of Divine energy and channels it into productive boundaries, as opposed to letting it sweep everything away like a flood.

Apparently, the commentators tell us, Yitzchak recognized that Esau and Ya'akov represented the two poles of life – the finite, limited, zero-sum-game material pole, and the infinite, unbounded riches of the spiritual pole. It was his intention to strengthen each of these two poles separately, to solidify each one in his own area of strength, with the idea that they would then combine their efforts and together achieve perfection. I believe that it was natural for Yitzchak to believe that this was the preferable path, given his nature that embodies *gevurah*. The kind of division of labor that he envisaged takes an almost superhuman discipline on both sides, the kind of discipline that Yitzchak himself had perfected over a lifetime. It would have required tremendous fortitude from Ya'akov to live a purely spiritual life on the material plane, but given the levels of perfection that he did attain, one could believe that he could have succeeded as well as his father. Since Ya'akov had the power of the infinite behind him, anything was possible.

Of course, as Rivka perceived clearly, the fly in the ointment was Esau. Esau represented the material pole of nature; he saw the spiritual as more of a nuisance than anything else. The point is that *the material side of life is not self sufficient*. The material depends on the spiritual for its very existence; the material world is just a congealed form of spiritual substance. This dependence is the basis of the human trait of greed – whatever level of material goods we have, it is always still finite and it is never enough. Until we have infinity, which is non-material in its essence, we are neither secure nor satisfied. Were Esau to have been given dominion over the material world, far from dedicating it to spiritual advancement, he just would have grabbed everything to himself, perverting all spiritual strivings towards his own desperate attempt to find fulfillment.

So Rivka overrules her husband and the blessings, both material and spiritual, go to Ya'akov. The spiritual and the material must unite in one heart and in one personality, as indeed they are united at their source in the infinite, and as they will be reunited and reintegrated when Gd brings the Messianic Era may it happen speedily, before the Esaus who are destroying the world can cause too much more damage. In such a future the material will in fact be able to stand in its full integrity, because it will be fully integrated with the spiritual. Esau will run towards Ya'akov and kiss him, but unlike the scene in

Parashat Vayishlach, the kiss will be sincere, and the two brothers will really be able to walk together, sharing their blessings with one another.

Shabbat shalom, Rafi Rabinoff

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, November 28 **Last chance to be photographed for our 2012 Membership Directory.** Photographers will be here from 2:30-9:00 PM; go on-line to www.tradcong.org to book your appointment, or call the office if you need assistance. No obligation, you'll receive a free 8"x10" portrait just for coming in. A FEW APPOINTMENTS ARE STILL AVAILABLE, FIRST COME, FIRST SERVE.

December 2-4 **Scholar-in-Residence Program with Rabba Sara Hurwitz.** "Women and Halachah: Debunking Myths and Supporting Facts." Full program information is available in our November Newsletter and at www.tradcong.org in the Newsletter archive.

Sunday, December 11 **Stitch 'N Schmooze, 10:00 AM.**

The Traditional Cares Committee would like to know if you or someone you know is ill and would like a caring call or visit, or if you are aware of not seeing a synagogue member for some time, please contact Shelby Kopp 314-991-1035 or the shul office 314-576-5230. If you are ill and would prefer to be contacted by email rather than by phone, please let us know that as well.

Have you seen... Our Shabbat Tot puppets?? They are missing—one girl, one boy. They are "3-dimensional with hair and facial features that stand out as compared to painted-on features, they stand about 10-12 inches long. If you or your children know where they might be, please contact the office ASAP.

Wanted--your Hebrew names. If you've not yet notified us with the Hebrew names of family members residing in your home, please contact the office so that we can update our records. Please include the Hebrew names of each family member's Father and Mother for *aliyot* and *misheberach*.

It's not too late to make a Yom Kippur Pledge. Thank you to those who have responded so generously to our annual appeal. If you've not yet notified us about your pledge, it's not too late. Pledge monies received by December 31st will be credited on your 2011 Donor Receipt.

Refuah Sh'leimah to...Gloria Golbart-Marks; Bobbie Kohn; Norton Kronemer

DAILY SERVICE TIMES

Sunday morning – 9:00 AM Monday–Friday morning – 7:00 AM
Monday-Thursday evening – 6:30 PM (*Arvit*)
Friday evening – 5:45 PM