



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego Study Guide**

***Toldos***  
***תשפ"ג***

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***Partners Detroit***

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## **Partners In Torah San Diego**

### **Mission Statement:**

**Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

**Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.**

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

Yitzchak and Rivka had been married for 20 years and had yet to be blessed with a child. To seek to remedy the problem, they stepped up their prayers and began beseeching Hashem. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak stood in one corner of the room and Rivka stood in the other, and they prayed their hearts out to Hashem. Their prayers bore fruit, and Rivka gave birth to twins, Yaakov and Esav.

Although the boys were twins, they were as different as night and day. Esav had a ruddy, hairy complexion, while Yaakov looked like a normal baby, although, he emerged grasping Esav's heel. These two factors gave rise to the names that Yitzchak and Rivka gave them. Esav was named Esav because he appeared much older than he was, עשוי-*complete* and covered with hair. Yaakov was named Yaakov because he held onto Esav's עקב – *heel*.

The Torah then offers a brief description of them (Genesis 25:27).

כז) וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדָע צִיד אִישׁ שֹׂדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יָשֵׁב אֱהָלִים

27) *The lads grew up, and Esav became a man who knows hunting, a man of the field, but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents.*

Rashi explains that Esav not only possessed the skill of hunting animals, he was also an expert at “hunting” people, tricking them into thinking he was something that he wasn't. He misled his father Yitzchak into thinking that he was righteous by asking him intricate, seemingly learned questions about Jewish law, although he never abided by those laws. Yaakov, on the other hand, was sincere, and what he said was what he felt in his heart. He was not duplicitous like Esav, and dwelled in the tents of Shem a Eber where he learned Torah.

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak favored Esav because Esav “hunted” him with his mouth, but that Rivka favored Yaakov.

(כח) וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו כִּי צִיד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אָהָבָת אֶת יַעֲקֹב

*28) Yitzchak loved Esav for game was in his mouth, but Rivka loved Yaakov.*

Of note is that Parashat Toldot is the Torah’s only parasha in which all three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, were alive at one time. Although we read about Avraham’s death at the end of last week’s portion, and this week’s portion begins with Yitzchak and Rivka praying for children, the Torah is not always written in chronological order. The math, though, is quite simple: Avraham was 100 when he had Yitzchak, Yitzchak was 60 when he had the twins, and Avraham died at 175. Hence, Yaakov and Esav were fifteen years old when their grandfather Avraham passed away.

The next episode related in the Torah is the interaction that took place between Yaakov and Esav on the day that Avraham Avinu died.

Avraham Avinu was a world-renowned figure. His kindness touched multitudes. He healed the sick, gave food to the poor, provided food and lodging to thousands of travelers, and was a beacon of kindness recognized by all. His death brought tears to the eyes of all who knew of him.

The first meal that mourners eat after their deceased is buried (and this rule is applicable today as well), may not belong to them; it must come from others. Thus, Yaakov was cooking a pot of lentil soup to give to his father Yitzchak after Avraham’s burial. The custom today is to give the mourners a hard-boiled egg instead of lentils as part of the first post-burial meal. Both lentils and eggs are round and have no “mouth” or opening in them. These properties convey two messages to the mourners:

(1) The roundness teaches that this is the cycle of life; one is born, lives for a certain length of time, and then passes on. We must accept this reality; (2) Just as the egg or lentil has no mouth, we also have nothing that we can say about the loss; we must all be silent and accept Hashem's judgment because it is just. We have nothing to add to the matter. [Rashi]

Here is what happened next (Genesis 25:29-34):

(כט) וַיִּזְדַּד יַעֲקֹב נָזִיד וַיָּבֵא עֵשָׂו מִן הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עָיִף:  
(ל) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל יַעֲקֹב הֲלֵעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה כִּי עָיִף אָנֹכִי עַל  
כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֶדוֹם:  
(לא) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מְכַרְהָ כִּיּוֹם אֶת בְּכֹרְתְךָ לִי:  
(לב) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלָמָּה זֶה לִי בְּכֹרָה:  
(לג) וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הַשֶּׁבֶעָה לִי כִּיּוֹם וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמְכֹּר אֶת בְּכֹרְתוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב:  
(לד) וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׁתְּ וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת  
הַבְּכֹרָה

29) Jacob simmered a stew, and Esav came in from the field, and he was exhausted. 30) Esav said to Yaakov, "Pour into me, now, some of that very red stuff for I am exhausted." (He therefore called his name Edom.)

31) Jacob said, "Sell, as this day, your birthright to me."

32) And Esav said, "Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?"

33) Jacob said, "Swear to me as this day"; he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob.

34) Jacob gave Esav bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, got up and left; thus, **Esav spurned the birthright.**

At that time a family's first-born child, the בכור - "bechor"- was earmarked for service to Hashem while the other children engaged in worldly matters. The first born also had the responsibility to care for his parents and see to it that they had what they needed. Yitzchak had just lost his father and was in need of the special meal eaten after the

deceased is buried. This should have been Esav's responsibility, but he was nowhere to be seen. On this auspicious day, not only did Esav not shed a tear over his grandfather's demise, he was out hunting. The Midrash reveals that not only was Esav out hunting, a sport that he enjoyed, he had actually worshipped an idol, murdered an innocent man, and sinned with a married woman. His "exhaustion" was from the litany of transgressions that he had just committed. Esav clearly did not accept the responsibilities associated with being the first-born.

Esav also didn't believe in the World to Come, and accordingly had no use for the spiritual elements of the first-born, service to Hashem. This is what he meant when he said, *"Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?"* There is nothing after death, he asserted, just dirt. So why waste my time with "spiritual matters"?

The commentaries explain the exchange that went on between Yaakov and Esav as follows.

When Yaakov saw that Esav was uninterested in his first-born responsibilities, Yaakov offered to buy it from him, similar to a person who saw someone about to throw his wallet full of money into the sea. He says to him, "Hey! Don't throw that away! Sell it to me!" By giving him something for it, he is doing him a favor. He now has more than he would have had had he thrown it away. Yaakov, of course, had no interest in the birthright's monetary benefits, *viz*, - a double portion; what he really sought was the spiritual components and the legacy of Avraham as it would be passed down through Yitzchak. Since Esav was unsuitable for this role, and Yaakov was suitable, out of respect for Avraham and Yitzchak, Yaakov sought to rectify the situation by purchasing the birthright from Esav.

Esav responded, “Since I don’t believe in the World to Come, I really have no use for the birthright, so you can have it!”

Yaakov had him swear so the transaction would be binding. He then paid him the price (bread and lentil soup), and, thus, successfully purchased the birthright from Esav. ***“Esav spurned the birthright.”***

These words teach us that even after Esav ate and drank (eliminating the stress of the moment), he nevertheless had no second thoughts, no remorse, about what he had just done. He could not claim that Yaakov had exploited his hunger to force him to sell the birthright, as he was relieved not to have it, and continued to trample it.

This seemingly minor “deal” between the two of them, which may have taken under five minutes to execute, plays a major role in Jewish history. Years later Esav will allege that Yaakov stole the birthright from him and that he is still the first-born entitled to its perks. When was that? When Yitzchak decided it was the proper time to bestow a blessing upon his first-born son, Esav.

By the time Yitzchak was 123 years old, he had lost his eyesight from old age, and it seemed to him that he was near the end of his life. Although Yitzchak knew that Yaakov was a completely righteous person who studied Torah every moment of his life and would carry forward the blessing of Avraham, because Esav had hoodwinked his father through his “hunting,” Yitzchak thought that he, too, was righteous. He reasoned that not everyone is cut out to be a Torah scholar who dedicates his life exclusively to learning Torah and serving Hashem. One who works for a living but at the same time fulfills all of the Torah’s commandments and uses his earnings to support Torah and the needy is also righteous. By

using his wealth to support Torah, he receives a portion of the Torah that he supports.

Yitzchak thought that Esav fit into this category and therefore wanted to bless him with great wealth so he would be able to support his brother Yaakov with abundance, allowing Yaakov to serve Hashem without the worry of livelihood. Through providing Yaakov the support to study Torah without financial concerns, Esav would also receive his portion in Torah.

At this point, and with that in mind, Yitzchak called Esav into his room and told him that he is nearing the end of his life and that he doesn't know when he is going to die (Genesis 27:3). *“Now sharpen, if you please, your gear- your sword and your bow- and go out to the field and hunt game for me. Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die.”*

Rivka overheard Yitzchak's words to Esav and immediately realized that this would be a terrible mistake. She knew that Esav was not righteous in any way. He was rather a completely evil person who didn't keep any of the commandments (except for honoring his father). Not only that, he disdained his brother Yaakov for his holy lifestyle. If Esav received the blessing for wealth, and Yaakov had no such blessing, Yaakov would have no source of sustenance. Esav would usurp it all for himself and not give one dime to his brother.

Had there been time, Rivka would have gone into Yitzchak to discuss it with him, but Esav left on his mission immediately and Rivka was afraid that she would not have the necessary time to convince Yitzchak of his mistake. She therefore summoned Yaakov and told him that he must



proceed as if he is Esav and take the blessings for himself. *“So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch me from there two choice young kids of the goats, and I will make of them delicacies for your father, as he loves. Then bring it to your father and he shall eat, so that he may bless you before his death.”* (Ibid 8-10)

Yaakov expressed the concern that his skin was smooth and Esav’s was hairy. What if Yitzchak decided to touch him and found him to be smooth instead of hairy. He would instantly realize that he was an imposter and, instead of blessing him, would curse him for trying to fool him.

To this his mother replied, *“I was told in prophesy that no curse will come upon you, my son.”* Hashem revealed to Rivka that because Yaakov was a holy man and, hence, he was the spiritual future of the world, the blessings belong to him. He will not make the pursuit of material wealth his purpose in life; rather, he will use it only as a means to support his spiritual service to Hashem.

In concert with Hashem’s plan, Yitzchak was convinced that Yaakov was Esav and gave Yaakov the blessings.

This was Yitzchak’s blessing to Yaakov. *“And may Hashem give you of the dew of the heavens and the of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine. Peoples will serve you, and regimes will prostrate themselves to you: be a lord to your kinsmen, and your mother’s sons will prostrate themselves to you, cursed be they who curse you, and blessed be they who bless you.”* (Ibid 28,29)

We see that Yitzchak wanted to bless Esav with wealth and possessions, as well as dominion and honor. The wealth was to provide for Yaakov and the dominion was to protect him. If he had received the

blessings, the whole world would have been his servants, but Yaakov would have had a very difficult time surviving in Esav's world.

As soon as Yaakov left his father's presence with his blessing, Esav returned with his delicacies for his father. At this point, things got a little sticky (Ibid 27:32):

Esav said to his father, *"Let my father rise and eat of his son's game, so that your soul will bless me."*

Yitzchak his father said to him, *"Who are you?"* And he said, *"I am your firstborn son, Esav."*

Yitzchak then said to Esav, *"Who - where – is the one who hunted game, brought it to me, and I partook of all, when you had not yet come, and I blessed him? **Indeed, he shall remain blessed!**"*

With his final words, *"**Indeed, he shall remain blessed,**"* Yitzchak indicated to Esav that he could no longer give him the blessings. Since the only reason that he wanted to give Esav the blessings of wealth and dominion was to provide Yaakov with sustenance and protection, once Yaakov had those blessings, Esav was no longer "needed."

Esav said, *"Is it because his name was called Yaakov that he outwitted me these two times? – He took away my birthright and see, now, he took away my blessing!"*

Even though the Torah tells us clearly that Esav sold his birthright to Yaakov because it had no value to him and that he saw it as a burden, here Esav accuses Yaakov of stealing it from him. He also feels that Yaakov took his blessing from him, when in reality the blessing was always meant for Yaakov. Yitzchak thought that Esav would use the blessings for Yaakov, but since the reality was that he would never have done so, Hashem arranged that the blessings go directly to Yaakov.

Does this sound familiar? Esav and the gentiles of the world are still alleging that all the wealth and success that the Jews have was stolen from them. They feel that everything we have belongs to them, and that we have stolen it from them. This is the deep underlying source of antisemitism. It is concealed in many different forms, but, bottom line, this claim is at the root of all the complaints against the Jews.

How are we to understand this? Haven't we learned that the blessings were really intended for Yaakov and that Yaakov bought the birthright fair and square? So why does the claim of Esav still reverberate throughout time until today? Isn't it a false claim? How has it endured for so many millennia?

The answer to this daunting and haunting question lies in the next exchange that took place between Esav and his father. (Ibid 27:38)

(לח) וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל אָבִיו הַבְּרָכָה אַחַת הוּא לְךָ אָבִי בְרַכְנִי גַם אֲנִי אָבִי וַיֵּשָׂא  
עֵשָׂו קוֹלוֹ וַיִּבְךְּ

*Esav said to his father. "Have you but one blessing father? Bless me too, father!" And Esav raised his voice and wept.*

At this point Esav said to his father. Is there only one blessing that you have, one that connects me to Yaakov? I want a blessing for myself independent of Yaakov, that I should be wealthy and have a good life. Bless me as a father blesses his son that I should be wealthy and prosperous.

At this point the Torah tells us that Yitzchak indeed blessed him as a father.

(לט) וַיַּעַן יִצְחָק אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הֲנֵה מְשֻׁמֵּי הָאָרֶץ יִהְיֶה מוֹשְׁבֶיהָ וּמְטַל  
הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל  
(מ) וְעַל חֲרָבָהּ תַחֲיֶיהָ וְאֶת אַחִיהָ תַעֲבֹד וְהָיָה כְּאִשֶׁר תִּרְיֵד וּפְרֻקָתָהּ עָלוּ מֵעַל  
צוֹאֲרָהּ

39) So Yitzchak **his father** answered, and said to him: “Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and the dew of the heavens from above. 40) By your sword shall you live, **but your brother you shall serve; yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.**”

Esav’s wealth would not be dependent on Hashem like Yaakov’s. Because Esav doesn’t believe in Hashem, his wealth would be the product of nature. As far as dominion goes, Yitzchak did not bless Esav with it. On the contrary. He said, “And your brother you shall serve.” Esav must be subservient to Yaakov.

There is, however, one significant caveat. **“Yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck.”** What is the meaning of this?

Yaakov’s entitlement to the blessings was to support his service to Hashem. Yaakov and his spiritual mission in the world as Hashem’s ambassador is the purpose for creation, and everything else is secondary. Esav has no argument with that and, on Yitzchak’s command, “will serve his brother.”

Should, however, Yaakov cease to serve Hashem and no longer play the role of Hashem’s ambassador to the world and pursues wealth and honor for their own sake, just like Esav, Esav’s claim, namely, that Yaakov is not entitled to the blessing, has merit, and Yaakov is thus no more entitled to the blessings than is Esav. Indeed, then Esav’s claim that Yaakov is a thief is justified! Yaakov stole the blessings.

The Malbim's (1809-1879) commentary on this verse says:

(מ) **ואת אחיך תעבד**. וזה יהיה לך לאושר הנפש, וזה תלוי בתנאי, אם יעקב יעסוק בתורה ויעבוד את ה' שאז תכנע לפניו, אבל בזמן שירפו ידיו מעבודת ה' אז תהיה אתה המקל והרצועה לרדות וליסר אותו, וז"ש והיה כאשר תריד, עת שאתה תרדה בו ע"י שלא יעבוד את ה', אז ופרקת עלו, כמ"ש בזמן שאין הקול קול יעקב אז הידים ידי עשו, וכן היה באמת שכ"ז שעבדו ישראל את ה' היה אדום למס עובד כמו שהיה בימי דוד ושלמה ומלכי ישראל הצדיקים, ועת חטאו ישראל כתיב בימיו פשע אדום וגו' וימליכו עליהם מלך (מ"ב ח)

*40) **And your brother you will serve:** This will bring you great satisfaction, but it depends. If Yaakov will learn Torah and serve Hashem, then you will be subservient to him. But when his descendants let go of their service to Hashem, then you will be the stick and whip to punish and pain them. This is the meaning of "when you will be aggrieved." This refers to the time that you will rule over them because they are not serving Hashem. Then you will be able to cast off his yoke... So it always was. As long as the Jewish people served Hashem faithfully, Edom (Esav) was an indentured servant as in the times of King David and King Solomon and all the righteous kings of Israel; but when the Jewish people sinned, the Edomites came to punish them.*

Here lies the answer to our question and, more importantly, the antidote to antisemitism. When Jews fulfill their mission in this world as Hashem's ambassadors, Esav is subservient to them. May we see this speedily in our times!