

Parashat Toldot 5778, 2017:

*The Voice of Jacob*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina and Chaya Mindel bat Leah Basha, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

*Sefer Bereishit* contains many celebrated phrases that have shaped our people's destiny for all time.

One of them occurs in this week's *parasha*:

And Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come closer, so that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." And he did not recognize him because his hands were hairy like the hands of his brother Esau, and he blessed him. (27:21-23, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Rashi (1040-1105), following *Midrash Tanchuma Buber*, explains "the voice is the voice of Jacob" as connoting "the voice of Jacob who speaks entreatingly [i.e. with respect and dignity]: 'Please rise;' but Esau spoke harshly: 'Let my father arise!'" In addition, the Torah teaches us that Isaac proclaimed "the hands are the hands of Esau" in a literal sense, since Isaac had minimal body hair, whereas Esau was particularly hirsute. Jacob, therefore, was able to present himself to his blind father as his brother, Esau, based upon the successful subterfuge contrived by his mother, Rebecca: "And the hides of the kid-goats she put on his hands and on the smoothness of his neck." (27:16)

Why did Rebecca utilize this stratagem? The Torah provides us with the answer:

And Rebecca said to Jacob her son, saying, “Behold I have heard your father speaking to Esau your brother, saying, ‘Bring me game and make me tasty foods, and I will eat, and I will bless you before the L-rd before my death.’ And now my son, hearken to my voice (“*sh’ma b’koli*”), to what I am commanding you. Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes. And you shall bring [them] to your father that he may eat, in order that he bless you before his death.” (*Sefer Bereishit 27:6-10*)

In sum, Rebecca guided Jacob in the usurpation of the *bracha* (blessing) that Isaac was poised to bestow upon Esau, since she was gifted with prophetic insight (*ruach hakodesh*) and thereby knew that the continuity of Abraham’s spiritual and ethical legacy could only be guaranteed through Jacob.

*Midrash Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* takes a very different approach in its explication of the phrase, “the voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” It suggests that “the voice is the voice of Jacob” refers to a profound grasp of the logical underpinnings of the Torah (*b’hegyon Torah*), whereas, “the hands are the hands of Esau” is applicable “in every instance of murder and all manner of innocent deaths.” (Literally, “*mavet ra*,” chapter 32, translations and brackets my own) It continues its analysis of our *pasuk* (verse) by suggesting:

Moreover, when it is declared in the Heavens that “the voice is the voice of Jacob,” they [i.e. the Ministering Angels] bestir themselves in a riotous cacophony of sounds [of joy.] And when “the voice is the voice of Jacob” is proclaimed on earth, all who hear and comprehend [its singular meaning] are inextricably joined [to the ultimate depth] of the phrase. [Unfortunately, however,] all those who do not hear and comprehend these words [when they are spoken] are counted among those whose “hands are the hands of Esau.”

Prior to encountering this exposition of our verse, we would have thought that Isaac’s statement, “the voice is the voice of Jacob,” was said but once in history, namely, immediately prior to the bestowal of the *bracha* that had been designated for Esau. The Midrash informs us, however, that our phrase continues to be declared both in the Heavens and on earth. By extension, whoever on earth joins the Ministering Angels in their jubilant acceptance of the Torah will be *zocheh* (merit)

to be connected to its holiness forevermore, so that they, too, will have the voice of Torah in their hearts, minds and souls.

*Midrash Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer's* interpretation of our *pasuk* is quite reminiscent of words that we recite at a *Hadran* (conclusion of a Talmudic tractate):

We express gratitude before You, Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers, that You have established our portion with those who dwell in the study hall, and have not established our portion with idlers. For we rise early and they rise early; we arise early for the words of Torah, while they arise early for idle words. We toil and they toil; we toil and receive reward, while they toil and do not receive reward. We run and they run; we run to the life of the World to Come... (*Modim* section of the *Hadran*, translation, *The Artscroll Edition of the Talmud*)

With Hashem's kind help, may we ever be connected to His holy Torah, for its words are "our life and the length of our days, and about them we will meditate day and night." (Evening Prayer Service, translation, *Artscroll Siddur*) *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.