

TOLEDOT 1.1 - THE EIGHTH BLESSING

There is a ruling in the Talmud which is codified in the Shulman Arukh which states that a blessing which does not include the Holy four letter name YHVH is not a valid blessing. 1 We can extend this concept to assume that this Divine Name of YHVH is actually the essence of all blessings. Furthermore we know that our Patriarchs were conduits to channel blessings from the celestial regions. 2 So when R. HaAri teaches that Yishaq was endowed with eight blessings, we see it reflected in the numerical value of this Divine Name of YHVH -which is 26 multiplied by the 8 blessings totaling 208; the same as the numerical value Yishaq. 3 The Liqutim MiPardes of Aleppo notes that seven of these eight blessings were given by Yishaq to his son Yaakov. This is also reflected in the numerical value of this Divine Name of YHVH which is 26 multiplied by the 7 blessings totaling 182; the numerical value of Yaaqov. 4 Simple math of 8-7 reveals that one blessing remained for Yishaq to dispense. It is this last available eighth blessing which occupies the narrative in this week's parasha. 5

THERE IS ONLY ONE REMAINING BLESSING

Yishaq apparently intended to channel this final blessing to Esav by asking his son to bring him some game and prepare it into something tasty. However, it was Yaaqov who actually received the blessing that the Lord grant him the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth. Upon hearing what had occurred, his brother Esav cried out to his father - "There is one berakha remaining with you - bless also me father." 6 Esav realized that this was the only blessing available and it too had been taken by Yaaqov. A close reading of the text includes a reference to it being the eighth blessing. In verse 28 it is written that Yaaqov be given from "the fat of the earth" 7 or Mishemane' HaAres - the biblical word for fat literally Shemane' hints to an aspect of the eighth - Shemona blessing. How did Yishaq suddenly discover a way to give Esav access to this blessing? Yaaqov was not the original intended target of this blessing. We explained earlier that his name Yaaqov - reflects his limited potential of only accessing the first seven blessings. Therefore this additional blessing given to Yaaqov would be subject to certain conditions. He would be constantly judged to determine if he has met the prerequisites for this blessing to become effective. After Esav pleads and utters a cry, he too is granted a right or given access to this eighth blessing. This would only take affect, if and when Yaaqov and his descendants might be derelict in meeting the conditions for the blessing. As it says in verse 39 - His father Yishaq then replied and said, "The fat places of the earth can still be your dwelling." Hema Mishemane' HaAres - namely from this eighth blessing you can still gain access. 8 R. Moshe Alshikh explains that Esav would take from an already available supply of God's generosity. No new blessing was added on account of Esav. There can only be a redistribution of the eighth blessing. The prefix of the word MiShemane' means that he only has access "from" the fats or "from" the eighth. It does not in anyway connote a grant by Yishaq providing Esav to go "with" this blessing. He would not own the blessing - but only relate to it as a slave without possession. 9

WHAT IS THIS EIGHTH BLESSING?

There are ten Divine channels called sefirot whereby the Creator dispenses spiritual influx into the worlds. While the first eight are actual blessings the ninth acts as a funnel or transmitter of these - sending all towards the tenth or spiritual reservoir for all above. The eighth channel which parallels this eighth blessing is known as Hod - which in its relationship to the body of man is associated with the thigh. 10 In Parashat Vayishlah we are told of the struggle for this eighth blessing between Yaaqov and the Celestial Angel of Esav. The latter is unable to overcome Yaaqov in wrestling the blessing away, but in the ensuing battle was able to injure his spiritual thigh. 11 Namely the angel revealed that Yaaqov was

susceptible in the area associated with the eighth blessing. As dawn breaks, Yaaqov demands this blessing be given over to him completely without reservation. The latter does not acquiesce but does recognize that his combatant has advanced spiritually gaining an ability to struggle even with Esav's celestial force in order to obtain or at least retain permanent access to this eighth blessing. The Angel of Esav in recognition of his new spiritual prowess calls him Yisrael - he who struggles with a spiritual force. 12 This is to conform with the Talmudic dictum that even an evil angel answers "Amen". 13 The name Yisrael had been revealed on earth in connection with Yaaqov's spiritual ascension at Peniel - The rights to the eighth blessing being assigned now to Yisrael as opposed to Yaaqov. Namely to the one that would be relentless in struggling for the eighth blessing.

THE BATTLE BETWEEN YISRAEL AND ESAV

R. Hayyim Ben Attar explains that as long as Yaaqov (now Yisrael) exercises dominion over Esav by serving Hashem in holiness, the blessing will remain in effect. Should he fail to serve Hashem properly, Esav would access the blessing and assume dominion over Yisrael. This is why we find that even a relatively minor dereliction of duty in divine service by the Kings of Yehuda - led Edom (Esav) to recover politically. 14 We also see this occurring in a previous era where Hashem had stirred up Esav's descendants against Shelomo HaMelekh - as a result of the latter's negative activities. 15 Throughout the generations there remains a struggle between these nations for the eighth blessing. 16 The Syrian-Greeks has temporarily usurped the position of Esav as the primary antagonist of Israel during the era of the Hashmona'im. Rome associated with Esav would only regain dominion over the Syrian-Greeks a few hundred years later. pinnacle event in our national struggle for control of the eighth blessing occurred during Hanukah. The original impetus of our success at that time was aroused through the spiritual and physical valor of the Hashmona'im. 17 Subsequent to their victory, our rabbis established the eight days of Hanukah as a Tiqon or rectification of this channel of Hod - a redirecting of the eighth blessing to Yisrael. 18 The enemies had gained access to the inner confines of the Bet HaMiqdash which is referenced by our Sages as the Hod of the world. 19 It is obvious that the miracle was effectuated by the Hashmonaim having their root in the number eight; their name coincidentally indicating Shemona or eight. It was also the Shemen or oil having its language root in the number eight - Shemen which was rendered impure but then miraculously located and then lasting for eight days. It is this light of the eighth blessing of Hod which descends all the way down to the precipice of the spiritual public thoroughfare via our lighting. Our task today is to continue to make ourselves worthy in our struggle against the spiritual forces of Esav to hold onto the blessing of Hod. If we falter, Esav will absorb a major part of its spiritual benefits. This is based on the prophecy received by Rivqah that "one nation will grow stronger than the other nation." 20 Our Sages explain that Caesarea or the domain of Esav and Jerusalem the domain of Yaaqov are seen as two ends of a seesaw. 21 The one accessing the eighth blessing of Yisrael will be on top while his counterpart on the bottom. The prophet Ovadyah envisions a time when the struggle for the eighth blessing will be concluded. He sees the house of Yaakov becoming fire, the house of Yoseph a flame, and the house of Esav turning to straw. 22 This evidently will culminate in the event of the building or appearance of the Bet HaMiqdash or the return of the channel of Hod to its proper place.

Shabbat Shalom

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