

by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

TO-L'DOT

Just Wait Until Father Dies

It is eerie to hear the threats Eisav utters when he discovers Yaakov has deceived him to gain the blessing: "Eisav said in his heart, 'Just wait for the days of mourning for my father and I will kill my brother Yaakov'" (B'reishit 27:41).

Well, you might say, at least Eisav has enough KIBUD AV to postpone his vengeance upon his brother. But the problem is universal. There was never a time when people didn't make plans, not all admirable, as to what will happen when their parents are dead: "When they have gone, I'll really let my brother - or sister, or other relative - have it..." "When they have gone, that's the end of going to shule, coming to Seder..." The possibilities are endless.

Those who harbour these feelings are otherwise decent people, but an obsession is eating them up.

Even more tragic is the thought that the sooner a parent dies the better. Naturally, most parents are not prepared to co-operate and intend to stay alive regardless.

Of course a complicating factor is the YERUSHA: how often we hear, "My children can't wait to get their hands on my money..." How does a parent feel to be regarded as standing in the way of the future? To think they (and their children) are only marking time?

The fact is that decisions in such matters are made by God, and in the meantime each of us has a CHEZKAT CHAYIM, a valid hold on life. Even those who feel tired and get little fun out of life have no reason to find no value in living.

If you can see, you can marvel at the sunrise. If you can hear, you can enjoy the chirping of the birds. If you can walk, you can go and do good deeds. If you can think, you can find meaning in memory. If you can speak, you can encourage others. If you can write, you can record your story. If you have assets, you can give while you're still alive. If you have skills, you can be busy to your last day. If you don't fit into any of these categories, you can find one for yourself. Whatever you do, don't give up on life.

And if you're the son or daughter of an elderly parent, get on with your own life... and honour your parents in life and after death, and try to forget the threats you uttered at a moment of heat.

Birthright

The name Birthright has a contemporary significance.

The Birthright Program is taking hundreds of young Jews every year to enable them to experience Israel and its people and many of the ideas and values which go with being Jewish.

It is a wonderful project and is already having a constructive effect on Jewish life in the Diaspora.

Presumably someone in Israel will realise before long that Israelis too can benefit from a closer acquaintance with their Jewish birthright.

The sidra speaks of Eisav as despising his birthright but our problem today is not people who despise their Jewish heritage but those who are basically unaware of its richness, colour and inspiration.

Whose fault is it? Can it be the people who do not know? What right have we to blame anyone who has never been taught? Can the fault lie with those who could and should have taught but failed in their responsibility? Possibly, but who are they?

Some would say that the blame lies with the TZADIK IN PELTZ, "the pious person with the fur coat" - an allusion to the person who says, "I'm warm. I have a coat. If you are cold, it's not my problem!"

Others suggest that outreach work requires special skills and some people simply cannot cope with the responsibility.

All very true, but there is a further category who cannot be absolved from blame, those parents who do not so much despise their birthright as give their children such a materialistic perception of life that any idealism they might have had is squashed and frustrated. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH