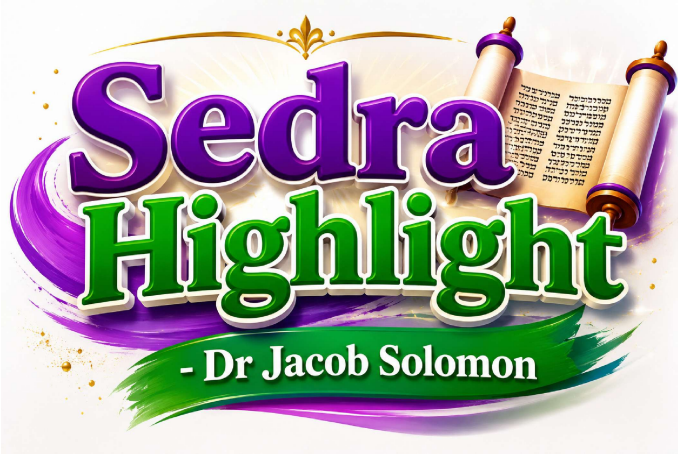


TO-L'DOT

Eisav was forty years old. He married Yehudit the daughter of Be'eri the Hittite, and Bosmat the daughter of Elon the Hittite. They caused bitter distress to Yitzchak and Rivka (26:34-35).

The phrase MORAT RUACH is commonly translated as "bitter distress", connecting it with MAR, meaning bitter. Rashi, however, relates it to rebellion: the wives' conduct provoked and distressed Yitzchak and Rivka, particularly through their practice of idolatry. S'forno expresses the parents' suffering dramatically. Connecting MORAT with the word for a razor in Shoftim 13:5, he describes the wives as a razor and knife cutting short the spirit of Yitzchak and Rivka's lives.

Yet, despite all this, Yitzchak intended to give the b'racha to Eisav. S'forno explains that he had not recognised the extent of Eisav's wrongdoing, including his failure to protest against his wives' conduct. In S'forno's reading, Yitzchak's attempt to bless Eisav was a mistaken judgment that contributed to the subsequent troubles within the family.

Elsewhere, S'forno makes a further observation that bears directly on Yitzchak's responsibility. When Eisav later recognised his father's displeasure with Canaanite marriages, he sought a wife from Yishmael's family. S'forno comments that Yitzchak could have protested when Eisav married the Canaanite women, had he given the matter sufficient attention - as Rivka subsequently prompted him to do concerning Ya'akov (28:8). Eisav's responsiveness suggests that an earlier intervention might have made a difference.

An alternative explanation of Yitzchak's intended blessing may be suggested. Perhaps he had come to recognise something of his own contribution to Eisav's difficulties and felt a responsibility to help him find a better direction.

Earlier in the parasha, we read:

The children grew up, and Eisav became a skilful hunter, a man of the field; but Ya'akov was a straightforward man who lived in tents (25:27).

Commenting on this passage, Samson Raphael Hirsch argues that Ya'akov and Eisav received the same teaching and educational treatment,

without sufficient attention to their different dispositions. The educational principle "Educate a child according to his way" (Mishlei 22:6) requires parents and teachers to recognise individuality and cultivate each child's abilities towards a worthy common purpose.

On Hirsch's reading, Eisav needed an education that could direct his active temperament towards serving G-d. Trying to educate him as though he were Ya'akov failed to recognise the person he could become. This was a shortcoming in the children's upbringing, though it did not remove Eisav's responsibility for his subsequent choices.

Following this approach, perhaps Yitzchak's invitation to hunt and prepare food represented a belated attempt to reach Eisav through his particular strengths. Rather than asking him to become someone else, Yitzchak gave him an opportunity to use his own abilities for good: hunting and preparing a meal in honour of his ageing father.

Perhaps Yitzchak hoped that receiving the much-desired b'racha, with its accompanying responsibilities, would encourage Eisav to make more of himself. If earlier guidance had been inadequate, there might still be an opportunity to offer him a constructive future.

This suggestion allows us to understand Yitzchak's intention as something more than an inability to see his son's faults. It may have combined love, hope and a sense of unfinished parental responsibility.

Events nevertheless took a different course. Through Rivka's intervention, Ya'akov obtained the b'racha. When Yitzchak discovered what had happened, he trembled greatly, yet affirmed: GAM BARUCH YIHYEH - "Indeed, he shall remain blessed" (27:33).

We may understand that affirmation as Yitzchak's recognition that the outcome must stand, even though it overturned his original intention. Within a providential reading of the narrative, he accepted that G-d's purposes had unfolded differently from his own expectations. It required him to acknowledge a result he had not chosen.

In life, we are sometimes called upon to make difficult decisions without anyone who fully understands our dilemma. We must examine our responsibilities, seek whatever counsel is available, and act without certainty about the outcome. Trust in G-d does not guarantee that our mistakes will be corrected without suffering. It can, however, sustain us as we act conscientiously - and give us the humility to reconsider when

events expose the limits of our judgment.

Sometimes moving forward requires courage. Sometimes it requires a U-turn. Recognising which is needed may itself be part of seeking G-d's truth. 