



Isaac plans to bless Esau, his firstborn son; he is unaware that Esau has sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob obtains the blessings by masquerading as Esau, fooling Isaac, who is blind. Jacob's mother Rebecca orchestrates the subterfuge.

Text:

Rebecca took the precious garments of her elder son Esau – which were at home with her – and she dressed Jacob, her younger son, in them.

[Bereishis 27:16]

Why did she clothe Jacob with them? It would seem that she wanted to make him conform completely to the image of Esau.

[Da'as Zekeinim]

Question:

Isaac was blind! What difference would it make whether Jacob looked like Esau?

Answer:

Rebecca understood that for Jacob to play the part, he would need to *feel* like Esau. Wearing Esau's clothes would enable him to “step into Esau's skin” and carry out the plan successfully.

Message:

“Clothes make the man,” more than we realize. For Jacob to step into his role, it was important for him to dress the part. Jacob knew his twin brother intimately – and he knew that his entire future, and the future of his descendants, was at stake; but in the final analysis, his ability to achieve the right mindset could hinge on the clothes he was wearing.

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For twenty years, Isaac and Rebecca remain childless. Finally, after intense prayer, Rebecca conceives, but a difficult pregnancy makes her think something is amiss. A Heavenly prophecy informs her that she is carrying two children – the fathers of two nations that will struggle for dominance. The children are born, one clutching the heel of the other. The elder is named Esau, indicating that he is “fully formed” with hair all over his body; the younger is named Jacob, from the word for “heel.”

As the children mature, Esau emerges as “a man who knows hunting, a man of the field,” while Jacob is “a wholesome man, sitting in the tents” –a reference to the “tents” of Torah study. Esau returns home famished from one of his outdoor excursions to find Jacob cooking a pot of lentils. Esau asks for food; Jacob offers it in exchange for Esau’s birthright – the rights and responsibilities of the firstborn son, who is destined to carry the legacy of Abraham and Isaac. “I am going to die,” Esau callously replies, “of what use, then, is the birthright to me?” He trades it gladly for a bowl of beans.

A famine in the land of Canaan compels Isaac to move to Gerar, home of the Philistines. Like Abraham, Isaac refers to his wife as his sister, to prevent the lawless natives from killing him to take her. Abimelech, the Philistine king, discovers the truth; he commands his people not to harm Rebecca. Isaac prospers greatly in Gerar, and the envious Philistines block up the wells dug there previously by Abraham. Abimelech tells Isaac to leave the land, but later comes to him for reconciliation, acknowledging that God is clearly with him.

An aging Isaac, unaware that Esau has traded his birthright to Jacob, tells Esau that the time has come for him to receive the Patriarchal Blessings. Esau is to prepare a special feast for the occasion. Esau goes out to hunt game; Rebecca, aware of the truth, commands Jacob to present himself to his blind father as Esau, and receive the Blessings instead. Jacob balks at the idea but ultimately obeys his righteous mother. Rebecca prepares a feast of her own, and uses goatskins to make Jacob’s skin seem hairy like Esau’s.

Jacob enters his father’s chamber masquerading as Esau. “The voice is the voice of Jacob,” declares Isaac, “but the hands are the hands of Esau.” In the end, convinced that the worthy son stands before him, Isaac bequeaths the Blessings to Jacob. Jacob leaves, not a moment too soon. Esau enters, and Isaac informs him that someone else has been there first. Esau lets out an anguished scream, but it is too late. Letting the truth slip, Esau cries out, “He has deceived me twice! He took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing!” Isaac, realizing the truth, declares, “He shall indeed be blessed.”

Esau decides to kill Jacob. Rebecca instructs Jacob to flee, telling Isaac that Jacob needs to marry and ought to go East to seek a wife. Isaac sends Jacob eastward with his blessing.

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