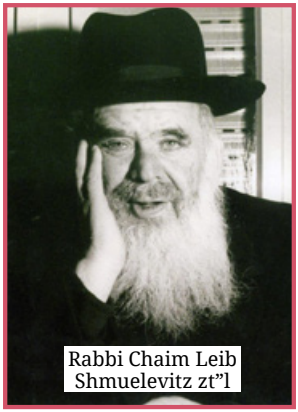
REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES
Faculty, OU Israel Center

Sizeable Sale

"Vayomer Eisav el Yakov haliteini na min ha'adom ha'adom hazeh ki ayef anochi... vayomer Yakov michra kayom et bechoratcha li vayomer Eisav hinei anochi holech lamut ve'lamah zeh li bechorah voyomer Yakov hishav'ah li kayom vayishava lo vayimkor et bechorato le'Yakov ve'Yakov natan le'Eisav lechem u'nezid adashim vayochal vayesht vayakam vayeilach ***vayivez Eisav et habechorah*** —And Esav said to Yakov, "Pour into [me] some of this red, red [pottage], for I am faint"...And Yakov said, "Sell me as of this day your birthright." Esav replied, "Behold, I am going to die; so why do I need this birthright?" And Yakov said, "Swear to me as of this day"; so he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Yakov. And Yakov gave Esav bread and a pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank and arose and left, **and Esav despised the birthright."** *(Bereisheet* 25:30-34*)*


Rabbi Chaim Leib Shmuelevitz zt"l

How is selling the first-born rights to Esav for a bowl of lentil soup and some bread a valid sale? Is not its eternal nature far more valuable than a meal, however hearty, that is consumed and gone within moments?

A number of commentators, Seforno and Rashbam among them, suggest that although it is not recorded in the Torah, Yakov must have paid a sizable sum to obtain the rights of the first born. The lentils were simply a physical representation of a credible financial transaction.

However, we can find an alternative approach if we look in *Sichot Mussar* by Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt"l.* There, he grapples with the following question; how can anyone possess material abundance if the value of each mitzvah is infinitely greater than any container within the physical dimensions of our world? Rav Shmuelevitz therefore suggests that the reward one would receive for a good deed is commensurate with the value one places on that mitzvah. Thus, it is conceivable to receive a finite reward for a mitzvah if one does not value the true magnitude of the mitzvah. With this approach, we can understand the Torah's emphasis on Eisav's attitude, "and Esav despised the birthright;" in doing so, Eisav equated the value of the firstborn rights with a bowl of

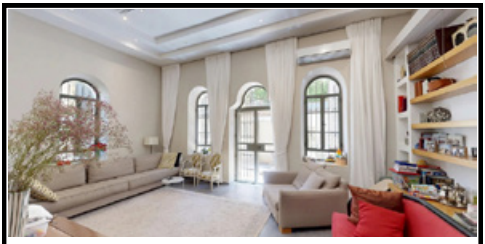
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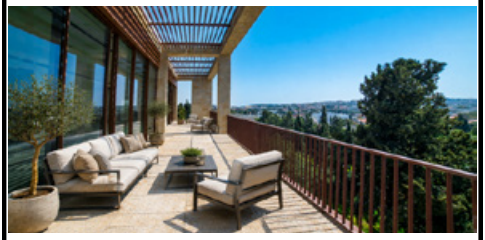
lentil soup and bread.

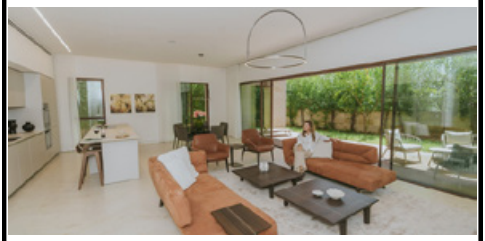
Similarly, the Ramban explains that the value of a mitzvah is proportional to the mindset of the one doing the mitzvah. One whose mitzvah observance is solely transactional will reap the benefits of just that — a contractual compensation. However, if one's focus is to connect to Hashem through the mitzvah, then he will enjoy the benefits in the next world, delighting in eternity. In this way, one's attitude toward the mitzvah determines the reward, whether in this world or the next one, or perhaps even in both worlds.

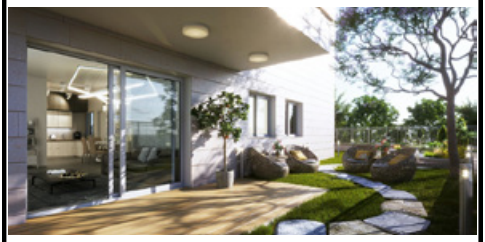
Let us honestly contemplate, how much value do we place on the spiritual facets of our lives? Where are we selling eternity for lentil soup, and how can we redirect our priorities? ■




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