



TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS

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The Divergence of the Twain: Explaining the Contrast of Esav & Yaakov

Sitting around the Shabbat table, a family member once opined “the Rabbis have a childish agenda against Eisav.” He referred to Eisav’s neutral characterization as an איש אֶשָׁוֶר, a man of the field (Bereishit 25:27) which is interpreted rather uncharitably by חז”ל.

For starters, Rashi identifies an אדם בטל, a layabout. What’s more, the Gemara in Bava Basra records that on the day of the infamous sale, Eisav committed five severe transgressions, including heresy and murder (16a).

Whilst Yaakov’s descriptor is equally ‘pareve,’ איש תם ישב אוהלים (a man of simplicity and tent-dwelling), he is immediately credited as a scholar.

To be sure, I don’t wish to rehabilitate

Eisav. Successive events indicate that the man remained on the wrong side of history. Nonetheless, it’s important to consider why he receives such a short shrift. I would like to build on an idea from a sefer I read during my basic training called ‘והאיר עינינו,’ by Rav David Gottlieb. Citing an approach by the late Rav Shimshon PinCUS of Ofakim, he muses: what became of this ‘man of the field’? Ostensibly, he’s the perfect choice to continue the Abrahamic mission! (Hirsch). At least in Yitzchak’s eyes, he’s worldly, rugged and courageous. Yet without a compass of values, the man of the field degenerated into a man of idleness. His worldly pursuit became endless days of directionless amusement. This phenomenon is the ‘root of all evil,’ explaining Eisav’s entanglement in sin.

Yaakov by contrast, shows a great deal of promise. He is a simple youth (Rashi) but pursues self-improvement through his studies. He commits to learning new ideas and forging stronger values. Whilst



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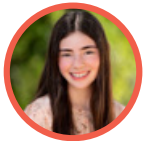
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initially leading a sheltered existence, Yaacov ultimately develops into a far greater man than rudderless Eisav could ever be.

My abiding lesson of years in hadracha has been that ‘bad behavior’ is a misleading term. More often, the so-called ‘bad behavior’ is simply a front to express frustrations that need to be anchored and channeled appropriately. Whilst Yaakov had the wisdom to set up his foundation, Eisav never bothered.

As the war rumbles on and we seek to maintain a high spirit of Jewish unity, the enduring message of Yaakov-over-Eisav suggests that whilst we don’t hide from the world and its grim realities, we take them on with a values-based approach that will ultimately instill courage in ourselves and those around us.



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12th Grade, Efrat

A Stolen Blessing

How could the bracha Yitzchak gave Yaakov take effect if it was meant for Eisav? Why did Yaakov have to steal the blessing?

The blessing Yitzchak meant to give Eisav was really for wealth and political power (Bereshit 27:28). Politics are characterized by war. The prophecy “no nation will lift up sword against (another) nation...” expresses a major difference from the usual. Deception is often essential for victory in war. The Jewish people would not be exempt from this.

Eisav was the obvious choice to receive the blessing of political power. Yitzchak considered Yaakov too “wholesome” to be successful in politics. He was more fit

for the spiritual priestly role. Eisav did not connect politics, war with holiness; he could not live an integrated Jewish life.

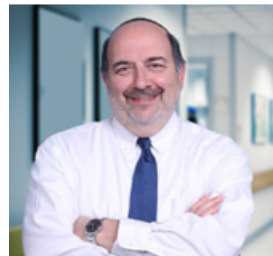
Yitzchak understood that Yaakov lacked the skill to be the political leader. Eisav had the skill, but didn’t have the right perspective on life. It would have been more sensible to change Eisav’s perspective than to try and develop Yaakov’s talent in political ruling.

Yaakov’s deception of Yitzchak proved Yitzchak wrong, showing that Yaakov did in fact have the ability to be a leader both spiritually and politically. “The voice is the voice of Yaakov but the hands are the hands of Eisav”(Bereshit 27:22). Yitzchak was unsure who was serving him, but he knew that this son was the right one to receive the blessing, thus explaining how the blessing could take effect on Yaakov.

Yaakov’s success in deceiving Yitzchak showed him to be qualified to compete in the deceitful world of politics. Deception must be used in the service of truth and goodness. “Distance yourself from a false matter” (Shmot 23:7). Normally we should be truthful, but sometimes this can have bad consequences. “There is a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

This dvar Torah is summarized from an excellent book called “Harmony Over Peace.”■

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