



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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At the very outset of our haftarah – and of Sefer Malachi – the prophet expresses the theme for his first *nevu'ah* of the book, a theme that connects directly to the opening of the weekly parasha of Toledot: the struggle between Eisav and Ya'akov. We, who have been nurtured by - and educated through – many centuries of rabbinic scholarship, have always understood the struggle of Eisav vs. Ya'akov as one of good vs. evil. Yet, even our great commentators struggled with that simple approach, as they also saw Eisav as a respectful son to his father and as one denied a patriarchal blessing that was promised to him. Given these descriptions, why did tradition settle upon that simple depiction of good vs. evil?

There is little question that Chazal's view of Eisav was based upon Hashem's own words that He shared with His prophet Malachi, words that we read in this week's haftarah. There, G-d reassures Israel that He loves them by stating that, although Eisav was Ya'akov's brother, He still loved Ya'akov, "*V'et Eisav saneiti*", while He *hated* Eisav! G-d "hated" Eisav and so Chazal understood that there must be more to Eisav than what is found in the Torah text.

Nonetheless, we are still puzzled as to WHY Hashem "hated" Eisav? What, ultimately, was the source of his "wickedness?"

I believe that this ultimate portrayal of Eisav as the archetype of evil was more a result of the actions of his nation than those of the ancestor himself. Consider: Yitzchak

loved Eisav – indeed, he "preferred" his "elder" son over the younger one! He was not bothered by his son's choice to become a hunter and even requested him to trap game for his father in order to receive a blessing. And, truthfully, upon reading the story of the patriarchal blessing, do we not feel a certain compassion and understanding for Eisav's resentment of his brother. And ultimately, did not Eisav make peace with the brother that, he felt, had wronged him? Is he to be considered "evil" because he was a hunter and did his father's bidding while Jacob is to be considered "good" because he "stayed in the tents" even though he misled his father???

Certainly not!

As Malachi continues to explain, "Eisav" referred to Eisav's nation, the nation of Edom. Indeed, the Tanach is replete with descriptions of Edom's attacks against Israel and their undying hatred of Hashem's people. The psalmist well-describes Edom's cheering support of the Babylonian hordes upon their sacking of Yerushalayim (Tehilim 137) while we read in Divrei HaYamim B (28; 17) of Edom's invasion of Judea that included the imprisoning of the Jews. But, perhaps most importantly, is the fact that Edom was not the only nation that was formed from Eisav. There was another, perhaps better known for their malicious and malevolent deeds. The nation of Amalek!!

How powerful does the great Rav S.R. Hirsch describe the very nature of Edom/Amalek:

“The principle of Edom is the worship of force, the laurel of blood is its highest ornament....and all the material, spiritual and moral forces....stand in the service of this ideal...This Eisav-principle stands in complete contrast to the Divine order of the world that fixes justice and right...**and the sanctification of life as the highest...goal.** The ‘Eisav-Principle’ is what G-d hates; the ‘Jacob Principle’ is what He loves.”

Rav Hirsch closes his essay with the statement: “That is what the downfall of ... the Edom Empire teaches (and) what the survival of Israel teaches”

A world that, for decades, has preached the mantra of complete equality has fallen into the inability of recognizing evil. “Edom does not exist-and perhaps never did; Jacob

is no different.” We are rightfully shocked to witness this blindness after the horrors of the Holocaust. “No one was right; no one was wrong.” Today we watch as tens of thousands around the globe march in support of beheading babies, murdering the elderly, torturing children and imprisoning the innocent....and actually believing that they stand on the side of morality.

Yes, HaRav Hirsch was indeed correct except, unfortunately....we have yet to see the final downfall of Edom. ■

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