HYPOCRISY
by Rabbi Daniel Travis

"And Esav was forty years old when he married Yehudith daughter of Beeri the Hittite and Basmath daughter of Elon the Hittite." (Bereshith 26:34)

Outwardly Esav was following in the ways of his father Yitzchak who also married when he was forty. However, up until then he had led a life steeped in immorality, and his marriage was a farce. To add to this disgrace, his brides were both devout idol worshipers which was a source of tremendous anguish for his parents. Esav’s actions may be compared to that of a pig, who displays its split hooves, implying that it is a kosher animal. Although a pig does have this external sign of kashruth, since it does not chew its cud, the internal sign of kashruth, it is not a kosher animal. In the same way, Esav flaunted his apparent righteousness, pretending to be extremely careful about mitzvot and only asking about the fine points of halachah, while on the inside he was completely corrupt.1

The Torah mentions three other animals which have only a single sign of kashruth: the camel, the hyrax, and the hare.2 Seemingly, the reason that they are not kosher is because they lack one of the required indications. Therefore it is striking that the Torah writes that the reason that they are not kosher is because they have a single sign of kashruth. The Torah considers these four animals to be more unkosher than others. Those that lack both signs are unmistakably not kosher, while these four which have a single indication of kashruth are to some extent taking on the guise of kosher animals. They represent a class of people who, like Esav, appear to be concerned about the welfare of others, while inwardly do not have such intentions. Since the nature of an animal has an effect on the person who consumes it, the Torah considers these animals to be particularly spiritually harmful.3

The parallel between these four animals and the deceitful nature that they represent goes beyond a metaphoric level. There are four classes of people who, after their death, are unable to behold the Divine Presence: liars, slanderers, flatterers, and scoffers.4 Kabbalistic literature notes that a person who was a ‘member’ of one of these four groups during his lifetime will be sent back to this world as one of these four animals. Since these characteristics became so ingrained in his personality, the carrier must continue practicing them as an animal.5

1. Rashi on Bereshith 26:34.
2. Vayikra 11:4-6.
4. Sotah 42a.


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