INSIDE OUTSIDE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

When it came time for her to give birth, she had twins. The first one came out red all over like a fur coat, and they called him Eisav. His brother came out holding onto Eisav's heel; he named him Ya'akov. (Bereishis 25:24-26)

Though, in most cases, the birth of twins is cause for great celebration, in the case of Ya'akov and his twin brother Eisav, it was an ominous sign. First of all, as the Midrash states:

It is a well-known halachah that Eisav hates Ya'akov. (Midrash HaGadol 28:1)

So, it seems, the struggle that Ya'akov experienced before birth ...

... Rivkah became pregnant. Children struggled inside of her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" and went to inquire of G-d ...

was destined to be a struggle meant to continue after birth as well:

G-d told her, "Two nations are in your womb; two peoples will separate from inside of you. One nation will overpower the other; the greater one will serve the younger."

The two nations are, of course, the Jewish People and the Romans. Though it is true that other nations would rise (and fall) over time, and even cause the Jews great distress, exiling them for periods of time, it is the Roman exile--the longest of all the exiles (around 63 BCE until today)--that has had the greatest impact on Jewish history, and continues to do so.

However, even all of this is only symptomatic of another, far more profound problem that has its roots in the very eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil by Adam HaRishon. For, we know that as delinquent as Eisav may have been in the end, in truth, he possessed many important qualities necessary for building the Jewish nation. This is why later, Yitzchak was prepared to bless Eisav in place of Ya'akov, and why Ya'akov was forced to "incorporate" these qualities of Eisav into his very being, first by purchasing the birthright, and later through standing in his stead at the time of the blessings.

This is even why Ya'akov was "forced" to marry Leah, who, originally, had been destined to marry

Eisav (Rashi, Bereishis 29:17).

What this means is the following. One of the most dramatic results of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the disunification of creation. Man was created to elevate creation even higher than its already pre-sin, high state of spiritual existence, which would have unified all of creation with G-d. Instead, by eating from the Tree without G-d's permission, not only did Adam not elevate creation, but he even reduced its spiritual brilliance causing it to become far more physical, and far less unified.

The more physical something becomes, the Maharal explains, the more complex it becomes. G-d represents the ultimate sublime spiritual reality, and therefore also represents sublime unity. This is alluded to by matzah on Pesach, which is merely flour and water, reminding us that the goal of the Jew is spiritual simplicity and the unity that it allows.

Had creation been more spiritually advanced at the time that Rivkah bore Ya'akov, there would have been no need for a twin brother. Eisav's birth meant that creation was still quite physical, in spite of all the work of Avraham and Yitzchak to elevate it, and therefore disunity still ruled the day. Ya'akov began to reverse this state by buying the birthright and taking the blessings, becoming, in the process, a new entity called "Yisroel"--the unified reality of Ya'akov and the positive aspects of Eisav.

However, as successful as Ya'akov had been at bringing unity to creation, he had over-estimated his success, as we shall see in next week's parshah, G-d willing. This is why he got the shock of his life when he found he was married to Leah instead of Rachel (not to mention Zilpah and Bilhah as well!).

Shabbos Day:

The boys grew up. Eisav became a cunning hunter, a man of the field; Ya'akov was a simple person who dwelled in tents. (Bereishis 25:27)

The Midrash says that at the age of 15, just after Avraham died, the twins untwinned. Ya'akov proceeded down the straight-and-narrow, while Eisav veered sharply to the left, down a path of immoral behavior that divorced him entirely from the ways of his fathers. Though the posuk makes Eisav out to be an industrious fellow, familiarized in the ways of the world, the Midrash tells a different story, of Eisav, the "hunter" of other people's possessions and wives.

Yet Eisav was not merely a hunter--he was a cunning hunter. In other words, he had the ability to pass himself off as a hardworking, honest, and reliable partner. This is why the Midrash compares Eisav to the pig who has split hooves (Midrash Tehillim 80:6), as if to say that according to the external signs (the split hooves), Eisav appeared kosher. However, the other sign, the internal one (chewing the cud), the one that cannot be easily seen on the outside, that Eisav lacked, and was

therefore 100% treif.

That is what makes the Eisavs of the world so very dangerous: there is something kosher about them. Eisav even thinks that his one sign of kashrus is enough to fool G-d too:

"In the Time-to-Come, Eisav will don his tallis and sit among the righteous in Gan Aiden ..."

However, the One who "knows the mysteries of the world and the workings of the heart" will see right through Eisav, and,

"The Holy One, Blessed be He, will drag him from them." (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 12a)

In the meantime, though it is quite a different story. In the meantime, for over a thousand years now, Eisav has reigned supreme, successful to the point that he was able to destroy the House of G-d:

The rabbis taught: When Rebi Yosi ben Kisma was ill, Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon went to visit him. He said to him, "Chanina, my brother--don't you know that this nation rules with the consent of Heaven, for it has destroyed His house (the Temple), burned its courtyard, murdered His pious ones, and destroyed all His good, and yet, they still exist ..." (Avodah Zarah 18a)

Rebi Yosi ben Kisma was referring to the Romans, who descended from Edom, who came from Eisav. His point to Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon was, "Tread carefully! This nation, as evil and as anti-Torah as they may be, has been very successful, and remains to be so! Could that be if G-d didn't sanction it?"

No, but not because G-d abandoned the Jewish people for Eisav's descendants. The sins of the Jewish people demanded an exile to set things straight over time, and unfortunately, after much persecution. However, to the one unlearned in the ways of G-d, and the process of Jewish history, it might look as if Eisav has indeed been proclaimed "Kosher!" by the Highest Level of certification possible!

However, this is only a test of faith for the Jewish people, and at a times, a huge test at that. In the end though, Eisav will lose the "hashgochah" he never really had to begin with, and Ya'akov will emerge to assume the position that had always been meant for him: the true firstborn of G-d.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Ya'akov said, "[First] Sell me your first-born birthright." Eisav said, "I'm about to die! What do I need the birthright for?" Ya'akov said, "Swear to me today that you will." He swore to him and sold his birthright to Ya'akov. (Bereishis 25:31-33)

The Talmud addresses the issue of taking oaths to determine the truth, and wonders whether or not there is any point in making a thief take an oath (Bava Metziah 5b). After all, if a man has no problem

stealing someone's property, why should he have a problem taking an oath and lying to protect himself?

In the end, the Talmud concludes that there is a difference between the two sins, since taking an oath means invoking the name of G-d, and the average Jewish thief knows that one of the Ten Commandments is to not take the Name of G-d in vain (the eighth commandment to not steal means "do not kidnap"). Therefore, in a situation of doubt, we allow the suspected thief to take an oath to clear his name.

However, what about Eisav? The Midrash says that Eisav rejected the notion of G-d and the World-to-Come, which means his oath could mean absolutely nothing in the long term, and had, even in the short term. That's why Ya'akov had to run for his life at the end of the parshah to avoid Eisav. If so, then how could Ya'akov be so naive as to believe that making Eisav swear could make a difference regarding his claim to the right of the firstborn?

If you look in most siddurim in the section called "Sefiros HaOmer," you will find after each daily counting two words. For example, the first day corresponds to "Chesed sh'b'Chesed," the second day to "Gevurah sh'b'Chesed," and so on. The average person may not know what these mean, and, for that reason, may pay little attention to them.

However, some may recognize these words as names of Sefiros, spiritual realities that govern our physical world. Although there are ten such sefiros altogether, we only mention seven (Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus), because the upper three (Keser, Chochmah, and Binah) are so sublime that their effect on creation at this time, is, at best, indirect. And because the period between Pesach and Shavuos is known to be a time for personal and national rectification, we focus on the spiritual entities that directly affect our world.

The word "shavuah," the Hebrew word for "oath" is derived from the word "shevah," the Hebrew word for the number seven. We saw this also in last week's parshah, when Avraham made an oath with Avimelech, and then named the place "Be'er Sheva," the "Well of Seven" (he used seven animals to cause the oath to take effect).

What is the connection? The idea is that an oath is far more than mere words uttered in the form of a promise. They are words that possess the capability to rectify what was damaged through the situation that led to the need for an oath, to restore completion to the seven Sefiros that govern creation. That is why breaking an oath is so severe, for its damage affects very lofty aspects of existence.

This is also why it doesn't really make a difference in the end whether or not Eisav stands by his oath, at least not to the impact of the oath in the spiritual realm. Just the fact that Eisav agreed to the oath to confirm Ya'akov's ownership of the birthright already led to rectification in the Sefiros above, and had paved a spiritual path to the physical reception of the blessings originally headed for Eisav.

Melave Malkah:

Yitzchak said to Ya'akov, "Please, come close so I can feel you my son, to see if this is my son Eisav or not." Ya'akov approached Yitzchak his father. He felt him and said, "The voice is Ya'akov voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav." (Bereishis 27:21-22)

On the simplest level of understanding, the words above mean: it feels like Eisav, because his arms are hairy, but it sounds like Ya'akov, because:

"He speaks in an entreating way, saying, 'Arise, please, and eat ...' whereas Eisav spoke in a harsh manner, saying, 'Let my father arise ...' (Rashi)

However, if so, then it would have been more accurate to say: It feels like Eisav, but the manner is Ya'akov's. For, if Yitzchak truly recognized his son's voice, it would have been a dead give away that Ya'akov was indeed impersonating his older brother in an attempt to take advantage of his father's blindness and "steal" the blessings. Unless, of course, we understand the concept of "kol" (voice) on a deeper level.

Though a voice is noticed on the outside, that is, after it has left the mouth of a person, it actually originates deep within a person, and is associated with the second level of soul called, "Ruach," which in this context, translates as "wind." In Kabbalah, Ruach is the level of soul considered to be the essence of physical man, as far as the souls go. This is why, as Onkeles explains back in Parashas Bereishis, when G-d breathed the "living soul" into man, the direct result was the ability to speak.

"It's not what you say, but how you say it."

We all grew up with that one, and although what you say can be just as important, the message of the above dictum rings true: communicating an idea consists of content and presentation. Very often, it is easy to judge a person's inner being just by the way he presents an idea through his outer being, that is, his body.

Yitzchak may have been blind physically, but he was from being blind spiritually. And whereas the message from Ya'akov and Eisav was the same--arise and eat--the being behind that message was very different, a difference that Yitzchak did not believe a single hunting expedition could change so dramatically. That's why he asked to feel Ya'akov, to verify what he was perceiving (had he not smelled Gan Aiden in Ya'akov's clothing, the skins that had been handed down since Adam, he might have pursued the matter further).

This is the true "Kol Ya'akov." We as a people are not always noticeable by what we say, but we are supposed to be easily recognized by how we say something, and how we do things, which often can make the subtle difference between sanctifying G-d's Name or, G-d forbid, profaning It.

Eisav was a master at convincing people that what was visible on the outside was representative of his inside. We have to master revealing on the outside what is supposed to be on our inside: a soul that is a piece of the Divine. In the merit of doing so, we deserve the blessing of Avraham and Yitzchak, and as we will soon see, b"H, we emerge to become Yisroel in the end.

Have a good Shabbos,

Pinchas Winston

I just want to mention that the person for whom I dedicated last week's parshah shiur has received an additional name: Chaim . The full name is now Chaim Leibish ben Hindel Blima. Please keep him in mind, especially this Thursday when, b"H, he will undergo a critical operation. Thank you once again for your help.