

# LOOK, TWINS!

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

When her term to bear grew full, then behold! There were twins in her womb. (Bereishis 25:24)

The twins, of course, were none other than Ya'akov and Eisav.

It is what you might call a conceptual oxymoron. The idea of being a twin is that of (at least) two 'things' being similar to each another. However, in this case, Ya'akov and Eisav represented two polar, moral extremes, the farthest thing from being "twins" - other than in a physical sense.

Perhaps that is why the Torah adds the words, "in her womb" (where else would they be before birth?), as if to emphasize that until THEN they were twins. However, once they were born, Ya'akov and Eisav ran down completely different paths, Ya'akov towards G-d and Eisav away from Him.

According to the Midrash, even while still in the womb their religious differences were apparent, as Rashi explains:

THEY STRUGGLED: . . . Whenever she passed the doors of the Torah (i.e., the yeshivah of Shem and Eiver), Ya'akov moved convulsively in his efforts to be born, but whenever she passed by the gate of a pagan temple, Eisav moved convulsively to be born. (Rashi, Bereishis 25:22)

Thus, in reality, it seemed as if nothing was 'gained' by having Ya'akov and Eisav born at the same time, for they were as different as Yitzchak and Yishmael, who had been born from different mothers. Why the emphasis on the fact that they were twins?

The answer is alluded to in the following:

Anyone who calls Avraham 'Avram' violates a Positive Mitzvah . . . Rebi Eliezer says, he transgresses a Negative Mitzvah . . . Having said this, then anyone who calls Ya'akov 'Ya'akov,' the same should apply! However, here it is different, because the verse itself later refers to him that way, as it says, "G-d called Yisroel in a night vision, and said to him, 'Ya'akov, Ya'akov . . .'" (Bereishis 46:2). (Brochos 13a)

Thus, according to the Talmud, even though the Torah recorded it for posterity:

G-d told him, "Your name will no longer be 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel' will be your name . . ." (Bereishis 35:10)

It does not mean the name change was absolute like it had been for his grandfather, Avraham. Rather, it seems from the Talmud that 'Yisroel' is a name that Ya'akov can be called, if and when the circumstances require it.

But, does it really make a difference? If both names belong to Ya'akov, and he is okay with each of them, then what difference does it make whether we refer to him as 'Ya'akov' or 'Yisroel?' It makes all the difference in the world, the Torah is indicating. For, Ya'akov is the twin brother of Eisav, but Yisroel, we shall see, b'ezras Hashem, is not.

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

After that his brother emerged with his hand grasping onto the heel of Eisav; so he called his name 'Ya'akov.' (Bereishis 25:26)

The origin of his name 'Ya'akov,' was indicated in his birth. Though Ya'akov was conceived first, the rabbis teach, Eisav managed to be born first, making him the legal first born son of Yitzchak and Rivkah. However, for perhaps the first and last time in history, the twin literally followed on the heels of his sibling, something so significant that he was named - by G-d Himself (Rashi) - based upon the unusual occurrence.

Was this an allusion to the future? The final exile is called 'Golus Edom,' the 'Exile of Edom,' who descended from Eisav, and it coincides with the last 2,000 years of history referred to by the Talmud as, 'Ikvecha d'Meshicha' - the 'Heels of Moshiach!' (Sanhedrin 97a)

On the other hand, the origin of the name 'Yisroel' is far more heroic, having come at the end of a night's battle against none other than the ministering angel of Eisav himself. Before releasing the angel, Ya'akov demanded that he bless him, the result of which was:

He said to him, "What is your name?"

He replied, "Ya'akov."

He said, "No longer will it be said that your name is Ya'akov, but Yisroel, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:28-29)

Thus, the name 'Yisroel' implies supernatural greatness, a level of spiritual perfection that Ya'akov and his descendants are capable of achieving when they overcome Eisav, when they cease to hold onto the heel of Eisav, but instead lead Eisav, as Yeshayahu taught:

I am G-d; I called you for righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations. (Yeshayahu 42:6)

In fact, whether we choose to lead or follow Eisav is the basis of another choice, that being how history as we know it comes to its eventual end:

Rebi Alexandri said: Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi raised the following contradiction: It is written

[regarding the time of the Final Redemption], "I, the Lord, will hasten it in its time." (Yeshayahu 60:22). "Hasten" and "in its time" contradict each other. [Rather, G-d is saying,] "If they merit it, I will hasten it, and if they do not, then only at the appointed time." (Sanhedrin 98a)

Thus, the Talmud is saying, the Final Redemption is an inevitable reality. However, the Talmud is interpreting from Yeshayahu's words, just when that 'inevitable reality' actually occurs depends upon the Jewish people themselves, and their merit, that is, whether we lead mankind, acting as their 'light' and assume the role of a 'Yisroel,' or whether we choose to follow on the world's heels, on only the level of a 'Ya'akov.'

Similarly, the Talmud interprets:

Rebi Alexandri said: Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi raised the following contradiction: It says, "Behold like the clouds of Heaven came one like the son of man" (Daniel 7:13). It is also written, "Lowly and riding upon a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). If they merit it, he will come with the clouds of Heaven, but if they do not merit it, he will come upon a donkey. (Sanhedrin 98a)

Thus, again, the Jewish people are presented with two choices, two extremes, regarding how the end of history can be played out, either with honor or with disgrace. And, again, like in the case of the previous quote, it is all a matter of merit, a merit that we are learning to be either a 'Ya'akov' or a 'Yisroel.'

And now, so close to the end of history, experiencing and witnessing Anti-Semitism, we have to wonder (and quick!) which path is it that we are walking, that of Ya'akov or that of Yisroel? The Final Redemption still eludes us, and if Moshiach is coming, it doesn't seem as if he is coming in on a cloud.

In fact, according to the Talmud, the animal that symbolizes Yishmael and his descendants is the 'chamor' - the donkey (Yevamos 62a). However, it is not the Talmud's way to take pot shots at nations of the world, especially by playing on a word in the Torah. There is a message to the Jewish people in this comparison of B'nei Yishmael to the chamor, one that takes on added importance at this late and troubling stage of Jewish and world history, for, if Moshiach is coming, he seems to be 'arriving' on a 'chamor.'

### **SEUDOS SHILSHIS:**

The first one emerged red, entirely like a hairy mantle, so they named him Eisav. (Bereishis 25:25)

SO THEY NAMED HIM EISAV: Everyone called him this because he was made and fully developed with hair as a boy several years old. (Rashi)

In other words, like Ya'akov his twin brother, Eisav's birth was the source of his name, the root of which is the word 'asah' (ayin-sin-heh), which means 'done.' As for his other name, 'Edom,' that is from the other aspect of his appearance at birth:

RED: A sign that he would always be shedding blood. (Rashi)

Thus, Golus Edom has been a very bloody one, particularly for the Jewish people whose blood has been spilled the most at the hands of the descendants of Edom over the last 1,000 years. Once Moshiach comes Golus Edom, now over 2,000 years old, will come to its inevitable end, may it be in our time.

Where does Eisav's strength come from? Yitzchak alluded to this in the blessing he bestowed upon Eisav at the end of the parshah:

"By the sword you shall live, but your brother you shall serve; yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cut off his yoke from upon your neck." (Bereishis 27:40)

WHEN YOU ARE AGGRIEVED: It means, when Israel will transgress the Torah and you will have reason to feel aggrieved with regard to the blessings. (Rashi)

Then what? Then Eisav's tremendous mistrust of Ya'akov surfaces once again, as it did back at the time that Ya'akov took the coveted blessings right from under Eisav's nose:

But he said, "Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing."

He said, "Is it because his name was called Ya'akov that he outwitted me these two times? - He took away my birthright and see, now he took away my blessing!" (Bereishis 27:36)

And, when that happens, then the following becomes self-evident:

It is a halachah - Torah principle - that Eisav hates Ya'akov. (Sifri, BeHa'alosecha, 69)

That is, Eisav hates Ya'akov, but NOT Yisroel, for when the Jewish people rise to the level of Yisroel, Eisav himself is transformed and elevated. And not only does he no longer hate his twin brother, but he assists him in his service of G-d, as will be the case after Moshiach's arrival.

According to the Pri Tzaddik, that was a crucial part of the importance of saying, "Na'aseh v'nishmah" - "We will do and we will understand" - at Har Sinai upon receiving the Torah (Shemos 24:7).

According to the Pri Tzaddik, 'na'aseh' corresponded to Eisav (they share the same root word), and therefore neutralized him and his descendants, and 'nishmah,' whose root is that of Yishmael, neutralized him and his descendants.

However, as the rabbis point out, the Jewish people's Heavenly response is out of order, which is what made it so Heavenly (Shabbos 88a). For, most people do not accept anything until AFTER first understanding it; here the Jewish people accepted the Torah even BEFORE being told what it contained, and why.

Perhaps, this has also had a profound effect on history. For, even though Yishmael was born first, his attack against the Jewish people is last, after Edom has heaped upon the Jewish people his worst venom. Yet, it is amazing that millions of nazis (yemach shemam), were able to do that which

hundreds of millions of B'nei Yishmael only dream of doing, but as of yet, have been unable to do.

According to the Pri Tzaddik, that is because when the Jewish people allowed the golden calf - which like Eisav emerged already formed and complete (Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer 45) - to be built, they 'broke' na'aseh, the word which corresponded to Eisav, returning his ability to destroy the Jewish people. However, 'nishmah' had remained intact, keeping Yishmael and his future descendants at bay, relatively-speaking.

Thus, when the Talmud states:

Rav Chisda and Rabbah, the son of Rav Huna, both said: Why is it called 'Sinai?' Because it is the mountain from which hatred (Hebrew: sinah) came down to the Nations-of-the-World. (Shabbos 89a)

When? After the Jewish people broke 'na'aseh' when the golden calf was built, or rather allowed to emerge, right at the foot of Har Sinai! No wonder the Brisker Rav said that the mitzvah of the RED (Adumah . . . Edom) Heifer, which Rashi explains to be the rectification for the golden calf (Bamidbar 20:2), is the key to the Final Redemption! (Haggadah Shel Bais Levi)

The only question is, why then does Moshiach come riding on the donkey - the symbol of Yishmael - if we remain on the level of Ya'akov, the twin brother of Eisav?

The answer is both subtle and seminal, and it will explain much: current history, the destruction of the World Trade Center, otherwise known as the TWIN towers, and why there is an allusion to the latter in the parshah of the Red Heifer, as well as Tehillim 23:4. The key, we will see, b'ezeras Hashem, is the chamor and the following posuk from a later parshah:

Eisav had taken his wives from among the Caananite women . . . and Basemath, daughter of Yishmael, sister of Nevayos. (Bereishis 36:3)

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

And an angel of G-d said to her, "Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son; you shall name him Yishmael, for G-d has heard your prayer." (Bereishis 16:11)

As is becoming self-evident, the names of Biblical figures were chosen not just because they sounded nice, but primarily because they described the circumstances of the way the person came into the world. Thus, the Torah tells us, with respect to Yishmael, his existence came to be because his mother prayed to G-d - a seemingly Jewish trait.

From where did Hagar learn to turn to G-d in times of trouble, especially when she had been the daughter of Pharaoh, who taught her to rely upon idol worship instead? Obviously this was one of the most important lessons she learned while living in Avraham's household, and a powerful one at that. As Rashi points out:

COULD I HAVE SEEN EVEN HERE AFTER HAVING SEEN: This is an exclamation of surprise: "Could I have ever imagined that here also - in the wilderness - I would see the messengers of G-d after I have seen them in Avraham's house where I saw them regularly!" (Rashi, Bereishis 16:13)

Thus, Hagar, the mother of Yishmael, absorbed some very important spiritual qualities while living in the house of Avraham, which gave her the ability to save her own life long enough to give birth to Yishmael, the father of billions of descendants throughout history, and the source of Jewish trouble throughout history, and particularly now at the end of Golus Edom.

Thus, the Arabs are a praying people. They may not resemble the Jewish people in too many ways, but in this one aspect, they are extremely similar, even making a point of praying to only one god as one God. And, as Rashi points out elsewhere, it is this particular trait of prayer that identifies the Jewish nation and makes them unique:

WITH THE SWORD: He (Bilaam) came against Israel exchanging his trade (the sword) for their trade (the mouth), for they conquer only through their mouth - through prayer and petition . . . (Rashi, Bamidbar 31:8)

Not only this, but unlike Eisav, who was only born from Yitzchak, Yishmael was fathered by Avraham, the 'Ba'al HaBris' - the one with whom G-d made the eternal covenant, symbolized by Bris Milah, to which Yishmael was also subjected. And, he continues with this act to this very day, a merit, according to the Zohar, that gives them temporary relevance to Eretz Yisroel.

Thus, any attack by Yishmael against the Jewish people is more primordial than one by B'nei Edom, for it reaches back to the time of the very covenant that set the Jewish people apart from the rest of the world forever. This never gave B'nei Yishmael the ability to be like the Jewish people, but as we can see today, it has given them the ability to make our lives difficult to the end, as the following quote prophesized:

Israel will say to the king of the Arabs, "Take silver and gold and leave the Temple."

The king of the Arabs will say, "You have nothing to do with this Temple. However, if you want, choose a sacrifice as you did in the past, and we will also offer a sacrifice, and with the one whose sacrifice is accepted, we will all become one people."

The Jewish people will offer theirs, but it will not be accepted because the Satan will lay charges against them before The Holy One, Blessed is He. The descendants of Keder will offer theirs, and it will be accepted . . .

At that time, the Arabs will say to Israel, "Come and believe in our faith," but Israel will answer, "We will kill or be killed, but we will not deny our belief!"

At that time, swords will be drawn, bows will be strung and arrows will be sent, and many will fall . . . (Sefer Eliyahu, Pirkei Moshiach, p. 236)

However, their ability to be spiritual has its limitations, as the Torah testified:

"He (Yishmael) shall be a wild-ass of a man: his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and over all his brothers shall he dwell." (Bereishis 16:12)

Ironically, it is with the Arabs that, for the most part, the most important physical commodity resides to this very day: oil. This has led to extreme and often perverse opulence amongst those who have been able to gain control over what has rightly been called, 'Black Gold.' And, this fact is what continues to tie the hands of the Western world from standing up against the whims of the Arab world, even when they are damaging to the world in general. A very ironic fact of history.

Hence, the concept of a chamor. A donkey represents physicality, materialism, and the very word for a completely physical entity is the word 'chomer.' The donkey is a beast of burden that exists for little reason other than to function in this way, and thus symbolize materialism.

Materialism? Wait, that's Eisav's - the twin brother of Ya'akov - domain. That's the world of the GOLDEN calf (and American is called 'The Golden Medinah'), the building of which empowered B'nei Edom to overcome B'nei Yisroel - and how! And, it is in the parshah of the Parah Adumah - the Red Heifer that comes to rectify the sin of the golden calf and end Golus Edom - that the Hebrew for 'twins,' 'hata'umim' is encoded in the Torah, the other name for the World Trade Center, the very symbol of American materialism, destroyed not by B'nei Edom, but by B'nei Yishmael.

What does all this mean? We have only scratched the surface and really ought to explore this more deeply. However, in short, it means the following: if the Jewish people rise above their Eisavian tendencies to seek materialism as a goal unto itself, then they will rise to the level of a Yisroel, and Moshiach can arrive in a spiritual and dignified manner: on a cloud.

However, if materialism (chomer) becomes too much of a priority in the lives of Jews, confining us to the level of Ya'akov so that we remain his 'twin,' then it will force Moshiach to arrive on a chamor - on the tail end of Golus Edom, finished off by B'nei Yishmael, who bear an aspect of what we ought to be, and are not. Our attachment to chomer will lead to the need for chamor, as part of the rectification process.

For, ultimately speaking, this is really the affirmation of the Bris Ben HaBesarim in every generation. We are first and foremost a spiritual people. The fact that we can be like Eisav and do his thing, sometimes even better than he can, is not evidence that we should. In every generation, it is the challenge of the Jew to infuse the material with the spiritual and thereby elevate the physical world and himself

And, it is no coincidence that Eretz Yisroel is at the center of that challenge today. For, after all, it is called 'Eretz Yisroel,' not 'Eretz Ya'akov.' It was at the border of Eretz Yisroel, as Ya'akov was returning home from Padan Aram, that he struggled with the Angel of Eisav, and received his new name, Yisroel. It is something to think about, and that's an understatement.

One more point to consider before closing. According to Kabbalah, history is not linear, but follows a path that resembles a U-turn. That is, the light of G-d that emanated out to create all that exists throughout history, at some point, reaches a 'bottom point' (which we seem very close to) and then turns around, returning back in the direction from which it originally flows.

Thus, at the beginning of Jewish history, we were in Egypt for 210 years, after which we wandered in the desert for 40 years. At the end of history, there will be 40 years of ingathering of exiles to Eretz Yisroel, followed by 210 years of resurrecting the dead in preparation for the World-to-Come.

Hence, if in history Yishmael came first and was followed by Edom, then it stands to reason that, according to this concept, in the end, Edom will be followed by Yishmael, as has been the case. This is especially so since, as history winds down, G-d will be looking to the Jewish people to fulfill the covenant that we sealed back at the beginning of our history - in Yishmael's time - at the end of history.

For, like a lender whose collection date approaches, as Moshiach comes closer, G-d will come to 'collect' on the Bris of Avraham's time from his final descendants. It will be Yishmael - who questions the very covenant itself - and not Edom - who accepted that ONCE we were the Chosen People, through no more - who will be Divinely chosen to inadvertently remind us of this fact.

Have a Great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

Copyright © by Rabbi Pinchas Winston and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](http://www.thirtysix.org) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)