

OH BROTHER!

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Dedicated by Rivka Michelle Kahn in memory of her beloved father, Zvi Mordechai ben Harav Roshe (Max Florence), z"l.

G-d said to 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." (Bereishis 25:23)

History is filled with turning points, some more dramatic than others. Some are even dramatic beyond comprehension. In fact, I just read a small little booklet written by a Hatzolah member who was almost killed by the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The booklet was written some time later, in honor of the marriage of his daughter, something that in his darkest hour he never thought he'd live to see, to give praise to G-d for his miraculous survival, after coming so close to a gruesome death that morning.

When you hear the words, "almost killed," it sounds so simple, like someone crossing a road and almost being hit by a car - a close call. It happens millions of times a day. However, upon reading this man's account, a close call was like going through the War of Gog and Magog, and barely surviving. Hearing his description of the events at Ground Zero, it was clear that history had made a major turn around a very troubling corner.

Far more devastating, and far more subtle, was the birth of Eisav. Never mind the fact that he was the grandfather of Amalek, the nemesis of the Jewish people, the only nation that G-d Himself declared war against until the end of time. Eisav, and so many of his other descendants, have been responsible for so much death and destruction throughout history in one place or another, especially of Jews. And worst of all, death has not always been physical.

From this week's parshah, we learn that there are three aspects of Eisav. First and foremost there was Eisav the bully. The Midrash tells us of how he took what he wanted and didn't care about how he went about it. If he were alive today, there would be a massive manhunt for him, and if caught, they would probably give him the death sentence. His favorite color was red.

Then, there was Eisav the religious man. Later on in the parshah he will ask Yitzchak about taking tithes on salt and straw, two items that are never subject to tithes. He was pretending to be religious in order to earn his father's trust, but in truth, his heart was not into serving G-d. That's how, "in the

Name of G-d," he could continue to act so unG-dly.

Then, there was Eisav the businessman, a lawyer by trade. According to the Midrash, Eisav always found a way to get his client off the hook, no matter how guilty. He knew how to make money, and lots of it. He was a technological wizard, and saw the world as a huge workshop to further his personal goals and ambitions.

It's not hard to see which of his descendants emphasized which of his characteristics, even thousands of years later. And, depending upon which of the three the Jewish people have been subjected to, that was the nature of the exile at that time, the test of that generation. Sometimes it was straight barbarism, sometimes religious coercion, and sometimes it meant being subjected to Eisav's world of materialism, and assimilating in unbelievable numbers.

Modern men do not relate to Eisav as their ancestor, nor do they see their ways as an extension of his. They don't realize that the trails they are blazing today are only modern-day versions of ancient ones blazed by Eisav himself, nor do they appreciate the long-term consequences of walking them. Perhaps if they did, the world would be a far different place today, and a better one at that.

SHABBOS DAY:

When it came time for her to give birth, she had twins. (Bereishis 25:24)

As rare as it is to give birth to twins, it is not so uncommon. The significance today of doing so is, for the most part, genetic. Even for an Orthodox couple for whom Hashgochah Pratis is a daily reality, how many think deeply into the extra addition to the family, other than "two for the price of one"?

However, for Ya'akov to have a twin brother is about far more than simply double value. It is an historical statement, especially when one considers how similar they were, and yet how vastly different Ya'akov and Eisav were from each other. In fact, it was in the way that they were most alike that they were so incredibly different. They did similar things in very different ways.

The statement can be summed up by the following posuk:

For G-d has made this correspond to this . . . (Koheles 7:14)

Zeh l'umos zeh.

As most societies have learned over time, the world consists of various different components, but after considerable thought and investigation, it becomes clear that most things exist in pairs, or in counterparts. For everything that exists on the side of good, there is something like it that exists on the side of evil. If something exists on the side of Kedushah (Holiness), then it has an opposite, but equal counterpart on the side of Tuma (Impurity).

Why is this necessary? For the sake of free-will, for choice requires a distinction between, ideally, two equal, but different possibilities. For, what kind of choice is it when the cards are stacked heavily

in favor of one choice? Unless a person is self-destructive, then he is going to always go with the option that serves him the best. And, if it is not clear which option that is, then, if he is prudent, he will research each option until the choice is obvious as the advantages and disadvantages become increasingly clearer.

However, since we are rewarded for the moral quality of the choices we make, it must not be so easy to distinguish the good from the bad in one of the options. There is no question that in life, some things are clearly moral or clearly immoral. However, in general, for people who try to be "good," this is not necessarily the case, and history has shown that good people made bad choices that they thought were good ones at the time.

That is why Eisav has three facets: to narrow the gap between himself and Ya'akov, at least externally. As the Midrash points out, Edom is compared to a pig that puts out its two hoven feet forward and claims, "Kosher!" However, since it is an animal that does not chew its cud, a sign of its being treif and visible only on the inside, and after investigation, it is completely unkosher.

It sounds simple conceptually, but in practice it has been the ruin of countless Jews who have wavered between Ya'akov and Eisav. Think about it for a moment. There are about 12,000,000 Jews in the world today. How many resemble their true ancestor, Ya'akov Avinu? How many are more like his twin brother, Eisav? And, how many have there been over the millennia?

Even Ya'akov Avinu had to fight the battle. He was put into an Eisav-like position on more than one occasion: "bullying" Eisav at a moment of weakness into selling him his right of the firstborn son; "stealing" the blessing from his blind father and absent brother; tricking his father-in-law and "stealing" his heart. According to the Yalkut Shimoni, the angel that Ya'akov fought against was Michael, the Guardian Angel of the Jewish people, which implies that Ya'akov's battle against Eisav was more of an internal one than an external one, as it always seemed to be.

And, when Ya'akov demanded a blessing from the angel the next morning, he wasn't merely declaring victory. He was demanding a Heavenly response to his life-long quest: Did I overcome my potential to be like Eisav or not?!

The angel's answer:

He told him, "No longer will you be called 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel,' because you have struggled with [an angel of] G-d, and with men, and have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:29)

Well, that may have been true for Ya'akov Avinu, but it has not always been true for his descendants. Part of the reason for this is far more subtle than many of us seem to realize. For, the essential difference between Ya'akov and Eisav has more to do with what's going on inside of a person than what's going on the outside.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Avraham said, "I realized that there is no fear of G-d in this place, [and that] they would kill me for my wife." (Bereishis 20:11)

There are so many themes to life and history, and so many theories about why we're here and what to make of all that exists. In pursuit of "the truth," we often find ourselves further away from it. It is reminiscent of an account from the Talmud that is probably not usually understood:

"And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moav opposite Bais-Peor." (Devarim 42:6). Rebi Berachyah said, "Although a clue within a clue [is provided], nevertheless no man knows of his burial place." The evil Government once sent to the governor of Bais-Peor [the message], "Show us where Moshe is buried." When they stood above, it appeared to them to be below; when they were below, it appeared to them to be above. They divided themselves into two groups; to those standing above, it appeared below, and to those who were below, it appeared above. This fulfills what is said, "No man knows of his burial place." (Sotah 13b)

There are different levels on which this Midrash can be understood, one of which is consistent with the above idea. In other words, one can go looking for the burial place of Moshe Rabbeinu, that is, where the truth of Torah that he came to represent, has left its deepest and longest lasting impression. However, depending upon what you hope to find, you may not be able to see it, no matter how clever you are and from how many angles you search for it.

This is because, of all the concepts Moshe came to teach and of which he represented, there is one that means the most to G-d, for it is the one trait man can develop on his own:

All is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven. (Brochos 34b)

Without this trait, one cannot hope see where Moshe is "buried" in the world. That is why the word for "fear" and "see" are the same: yireh. Because true fear of G-d is really the seeing of G-d in the world, and that perception affects all levels of vision. Ultimately, this is what separates Ya'akov from Eisav, and transforms the former into a Yisroel, the "community" to which G-d-fearers belong.

This was the point that Avraham made to Avimelech a few parshios ago when, in answer to Avimelech's querie:

Avimelech called Avraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? What did I do to you that you brought upon me and upon my kingdom this great transgression? You should not have done this! What did you see that caused you to do such a thing?" (Bereishis 20:9-10)

To which Avraham said flatly:

"I realized that there is no fear of G-d in this place, [and that] they would kill me for my wife." (Bereishis 20:11)

This was not merely an incidental response, but an observation from a man whose entire life's journey was in search of that very trait: fear of G-d - something he only fully understood after the

Akeidah.

MELAVE MALKAH:

He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him, for now I know that you fear G-d. You have not held back your son, your only one from Me." (Bereishis 22:12)

From now on, I have something to answer Satan and the nations who wonder what is My love for you. I have a justification now that they see "that you are G-d-fearing." (Rashi)

Why? Because, "You have not held back your son, your only one from Me." Thus, we see that the true basis for fear of G-d, and without question, is the willingness to give up that which we value the most in the service of G-d. Entering the fiery furnace in Ur Kasdim at Nimrod's command to prove his belief in G-d was one thing, and that would have ended with his own death. However, after sacrificing Yitzchak and then having to live day- after-day with that memory, proved to what extent Avraham was prepared to sacrifice for G-d.

This also provides another angle to the episode that happened in Shechem with Dinah, and Ya'akov's response to it. What happened to Dinah, as we have spoken about in a previous week, was Hashgochah Pratis; everything is. Like Avraham who did not mourn excessively over the loss of his wife, we learn that Ya'akov did not overreact to the violation of his daughter, something that Shimon and Levi found easier to do rather than to control.

In a sense, it was like the Akeidah all over again, because by keeping his peace, Ya'akov sacrificed his own daughter to G-d, not through the actual physical killing of her, but by accepting what was expected of him. This earned him the name, Yisroel, as confirmed by G-d Himself, only AFTER the incident in Shechem.

A lot of people have sought to change the world "for the better," and "in the Name of G-d." But, if they had looked deep down inside of themselves, as history has born out, they would have known that, like Eisav, the "kosher simanim" merely camouflaged the treif ones on the inside. And, this is always at the cost of Jewish lives, either physically or spiritually, especially today. In the end, they weren't prepared to give it all up for G-d, but to increase what they wanted, and ironically, in the Name of G-d.

Thus, it is no coincidence that Jews view making aliyah as a sacrifice. That is why it is called Eretz YISROEL (the Land of Yisroel), and why the Malbim interprets Yirimyahu's words in the following manner:

For thus said Hashem: Sing, O Ya'akov, with gladness, exult on the peaks of the nations; announce, laud [G-d], and say, "O Hashem, save Your people, the remnant of Yisroel!" Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant and birthing together; a great congregation will return here. With weeping they will come and through supplications I will bring them; I will guide them on streams of

water, on a direct path in which they will not stumble; for I have been a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. (Yirmiyahu 31:6-8)

At the end of their exile, the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be on the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be their heads, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were at first. Ya'akov will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them; Yisroel are the great ones. The joyousness from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will "announce" and publicly proclaim, and "praise" Hashem when they say, "O Hashem, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel," because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exiles and return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that Hashem will return them: Behold, I will bring them . . . (Malbim, q.v. v'Tzahalu B'Rosh HaGoyim)

Thus, the Malbim sees a division that will occur in the Jewish people at the end of days, one which will not occur along traditional lines. There will be two camps amongst the Jews, one called Ya'akov and one called Yisroel, and the difference between the two will be based upon the desire, or lack thereof to reject acceptance amongst the gentiles as sufficient redemption.

Apparently it is the Ya'akov side of the Jewish people (the masses) who will be joyous about staying in the Diaspora, enjoying acceptance amongst the gentiles and even positions of leadership. On the other hand, this will not be satisfactory for the Yisroel camp of the Jewish people, and they will publicly long for the ideal form of redemption, for return to Eretz Yisroel and to Tzion - true Tzion. It will be a great Kiddush Hashem, and apparently, trigger the final stage of the Final Redemption, and may it happen speedily in our time.

*Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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