

THE 4TH STRATEGY

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

What was the sin of Yaakov that exposed him to the danger of doing battle with the angel of Eisav?

Why was Yaakov wounded in his battle with the angel of Eisav?

Why was he wounded in his thigh?

What was so important about the battle and Yaakov's wound that G-d immortalized them by prohibiting the eating of the "Gid hanashe?"

The Talmud says, "It is a Halacha - a law of nature that Eisav hates Yaakov." The term "Halacha" indicates that Eisav's hatred for Yaakov should be viewed as a given, and as the children of Yaakov it is our obligation to incorporate that "fact" into our lifestyle. The Talmud's statement is also written in the present tense rather than the past tense. Therefore, it must be referring to a contemporary reality that is far beyond the ancient rivalry of two brothers.

Why does Eisav hate Yaakov, and how does that impact us as Jews? How does Eisav's hatred affect our relationship with the non-Jewish world?

Why does the Talmudic dictum use the name "Yaakov" rather than the name "Yisroel?" It would seem that Eisav's hatred would have been far greater after Yaakov had bested his angel than before. Therefore, it should say, 'It is a Halacha that Eisav hates Yisroel.'

Furthermore, what does Eisav hate about Yaakov and how does that hatred manifest itself? It must be because of the main item that differentiates him from Yaakov must motivate Eisav's hatred for Yaakov. What is that one differentiating factor?

From the very first description of Yaakov and Eisav the Torah states that Yaakov devoted himself to "dwelling in the tent," while Eisav was a "man of the field." Yaakov loved to study while Eisav hunted and explored. The main difference between Yaakov and Eisav was that Yaakov loved to study Torah and Eisav wanted nothing to do with the study of Torah. Therefore, Eisav must have hated Yaakov because Yaakov studied Torah.

Likewise, we can extend Eisav's hatred for Yaakov into the present. Eisav, representing the enemies of the Jews, hates Yaakov, representing the Jews, because the Jews were entrusted with studying the Torah and keeping the 613 mitzvos.

If the Torah is what separates the Jews from the other nations, and the other nations "hate" us for

that difference, then it makes sense to conclude that so long as we study the Torah G-d will protect us from their hatred.

A quick study of history bears out this conclusion. Throughout our long history, we have been subject to the greatest persecution at times when the Jews attempted to be like the other nations and assimilate into secular culture. The world has always resented us for who we are. However, so long as we were proud of being the Chosen People the world also respected us for who we are. Once we gave up the Torah that makes us chosen, their hatred became overt and destructive.

Logic would suggest otherwise. Logic suggests that people hate each other because they are different from each other. The source of bigotry and intolerance is perceived differences. Therefore, logic suggests that the degree to which the Jew remained different and apart from society would be the degree to which Eisav would hate and persecute him. Yet, in relation to us, Eisav's behavior is the opposite! The more we attempt to be like Eisav the greater his hatred. The more we are proud to be different, the more we are protected from his hatred.

After Eisav discovered that Yaakov had successfully "stolen" his intended blessing, Eisav proclaimed, "he took away my birthright and see, now he took away my blessing!" (27:36). Later it says, "Eisav hated Yaakov because of the blessing which his father had blessed him (Yaakov)" (27:41). Why did Eisav's hatred result more from the stealing of the blessing than by Yaakov's purchase of the birthright?

The Halacha that "Eisav hated Yaakov", means the following. Eisav hated Yaakov because Yaakov bought the birthright and then took his intended blessing. The birthright and the blessings were a package deal. The birthright was the responsibility of leading the world toward greater recognition and service of G-d. The blessing that Yaakov "stole" from Eisav was the potential to acquire material wealth for the purpose of leading the world in recognition and service of G-d. However, Eisav wanted to lead the world without being responsible for its spirituality. Therefore, he sold his birthright, the responsibility, to Yaakov. At the same time, his intentions were to retain the material wealth and world leadership. However, Eisav did not realize that the one who had the responsibility would eventually become the leader.

After Yitzchak gave his blessing to Yaakov, Eisav begged his father for another blessing. Yitzchak blessed Eisav with what seemed to be exactly what Eisav wanted. "The fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and by the sword you shall live": (27:39-40). Material wealth and power! However, it became clear that the blessing was conditional. "True, you will have power and material wealth, but you will not lead the world. In fact, so long as Yaakov learns Torah and keeps the mitzvos you will be subservient to Yaakov. The only time you will have world dominance and leadership is if Yaakov does not learn Torah and does not keep the mitzvos." (see Rashi, 27:40). It is the very next verse that says, "Now Eisav harbored hatred toward Yaakov because of the blessing" (27:41). The reason why Eisav hated Yaakov was because Yaakov had both the Torah and the leadership role. However, so

long as the Jews keep the Torah, no matter how much our enemies hate us, we are protected and they leave us alone. As soon as Yaakov stops keeping the Torah, Eisav is able to dominate and express his hatred. Therefore, the more we assimilate the greater the persecution. The less we assimilate, the less the persecution!

The Talmud in Megilah (3a) explains the story of Yehoshua's encounter with an angel the night before the battle for Yericho. The Navi relates that as the Jews prepared for the first battle to take Eretz Yisroel, Yehoshua was busy inspecting and encouraging the troops. During his rounds, he encountered a "stranger" who confronted him. The Navi then reveals that the stranger was an angel who had been sent to criticize Yehoshua for having not studied Torah that night. Usually Yehoshua spent his nights learning and teaching Torah. However, because of the obvious preparations, Yehoshua had suspended his regular schedule of study. The Talmud explains that Yehoshua immediately returned to his regular schedule and spent the night studying and teaching Torah.

We can conclude from this talmudic passage that the study of Torah is far more important than just the means toward the end of doing mitzvos. Obviously, the study of Torah is essential to know how to be and how to behave. However, the study of Torah has an intrinsic value that stands on its own.

Rashi 32:8 references the Medresh Tanchumah that analyzes Yaakov's preparation for his encounter with Eisav. The Medresh points out that in anticipation of armed conflict Yaakov split the camp and divided his forces. Hoping to avoid armed conflict, Yaakov sent Eisav presents and tribute. His third strategy was to pray to G-d and ask for His help. The first two were clearly predicated on the third.

However, based upon the talmudic passage in Megilah, there should have been a fourth component in Yaakov's overall strategy. Where was the study of Torah?

I would like to suggest that because Yaakov had not studied Torah in preparation for his confrontation with Eisav, he exposed himself to the dangers of the angel of Eisav. Remember, it is the study of Torah that sets Yaakov apart from Eisav, and it is the study of Torah that protects Yaakov from Eisav! Furthermore, the fact that during the battle Yaakov was wounded on his thigh is because he had not studied Torah in preparation for confronting Eisav.

The Talmud in Shabbos records the famous conversation between Hillel and the Convert. The Convert asked to be taught the entire Torah while standing on one leg. Hillel proceeded to do so and told the Convert, "What is hateful to you do not do to your friend. The rest of the Torah is an explanation of that concept. Go and study."

The conversation was not about standing on one leg. The Convert's unusual request was directed at understanding the focus of Torah and Judaism. Hillel explained to the Convert that the greatest expression of service to G-d should be manifest in our social relationships. The rest of the Torah is the means toward understanding how to be and how to behave.

The "one leg" that the Convert was standing on when Hillel taught him Torah was the overt and

active Torah of mitzvos; the Torah of social interaction and personal behavior. The "other leg" which the Convert needed to still attain was the study of Torah.

Often students justifiably wonder why they have to study seemingly non-contemporary or practical laws. The reason we teach more than just the practical is because Torah is a system whose individual components are both inherently and systemically valuable. Each component is important by itself as well as necessary for the viability of the entire Torah.

Yaakov should have studied in preparation for his encounter with Eisav. Because he did not study, the angel of Eisav was able to attack him. At the end of the battle, the angel wounded one of Yaakov's legs. G-d was emphasizing to Yaakov that his greatest protection from Eisav's hatred is the one leg of "the study of Torah." Therefore, for generations to come G-d commanded that we not eat the sciatic nerve as a reminder that the very thing that sets us apart from Eisav, the study of Torah, is our greatest protection from Eisav.

The reason why the Talmudic dictum, "It is a Halacha that Eisav hates Yaakov" uses the name Yaakov, rather than Yisroel is because the name Yisroel came after the battle. Yaakov was victorious against Eisav's angel. That means that in the end, Eisav will accept Yaakov's primacy and leadership. However, that will only happen at the time of Mashiach. Before that time, Eisav will continue to hate "Yaakov". Eisav will refuse to accept Yaakov's true leadership role as "Yisroel". So long as Eisav does not accept the appointment of Yaakov as first-born and world leader, the Jews remain Yaakov. As soon as Eisav accepts Yaakov as first-born and leader his hatred toward Yaakov will dissipate and he will embrace us as "Yisroel".

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