

# THE PURPOSE OF CREATION PART VIII

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

## It Takes Two To Fight

Something must have gone wrong. Yakov had successfully fled from his father's home after taking Eisav's blessing. He arrived in Charan, poorer, but none the worse for wear. For the next twenty years Yakov and his growing family survived Lavan and his henchmen's insidious conspiracies and then managed to escape across the border relatively unscathed.

Supported by his four wives, eleven sons, and extensive household staff, Yakov prepared for his confrontation with Eisav. He analyzed the situation and applied a three-pronged defense strategy of prayer, diplomacy and military preparedness. Yet, at the venerable age of 97, at the moment of his greatest triumph over Eisav's Angel, Yakov suffered physical harm and damage. Why? Why at that juncture in history, and why the damage to his thigh (sciatica)?

The story of Yakov and Eisav is the story of our world, as it might have been, as it is, and how it might yet be. It should have been a partnership between Yakov and Eisav. Instead, Yakov bought Eisav's birthright, took the accompanying blessing, and the twin brothers went their separated ways. Brotherly love, military alliances and national treaties should have bridged the distance between Yakov and Eisav. Instead, the schism was filled with Eisav's relentless hatred for the twin brother he once bested while still within Rivkah's womb. In the end, the individual choices made by Yakov and Eisav resulted in a divided world with seemingly divergent destinies.

In attempting to understand the reasons for the separation, we tend to focus on Eisav's hatred and persecution of Yakov. Whether Eisav himself, his son Alifaz, his grandson Amalek, or the ignoble gallery of evil descendents from Haman to Hitler, Eisav became Yakov's historic arch-rival. Eisav is jealous of Yakov for being G-d's chosen. Eisav wishes to eliminate Yakov / Israel and do away with the contrasting scale of justice, morality, and devotion that Yakov represents. But what about Yakov? What part did he play, or not play, in the adversarial relationship? Was it all Eisav's fault or was there fault in Yakov as well?

The premise upon which Avraham's descendents were chosen to receive the Torah and become the guardians and teachers of G-d's law was Avraham's and Sarah's monumental love and concern for all of humanity. They were not content to live within the tent of their own righteousness. They understood that to love G-d meant to emulate Him. To love G-d meant to share Him with as many

souls as possible. However, it was never intended that one or two people shoulder the responsibility of becoming G-d's teachers. It was G-d's intention that a nation be raised within the protective tents of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah who would develop into an indomitable force of truth and goodness.

Had the rest of the nations embraced Avraham's message, the world would have quickly attained universal redemption and the Messianic era. However, for 500 years, from the birth of Avraham till the time of the exodus from Egypt, Israel stood alone. They were not yet a nation to be reckoned with and the rest of the world refused to embrace Avraham's legacy of human nobility, hope, and glory. Only at the exodus from Egypt were the other nations forced to take notice of their newfound nationhood. (This explains why Amalek / Eisav attacked us at that moment.)

We explained in the Rabbi's Notebook on Toldos that Chesed (kindness) starts at home. Avraham and Sarah certainly understood this and first attempted to influence Avraham's brothers Haran and Nachor. When that failed they turned their attention to Haran's son Lot and later to the daughters of Nachor's family, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. Had they initially been successful in "converting" Haran and Nachor, Avraham would have started with a powerful alliance of supportive and capable partners in accomplishing G-d's intentions. Because they failed in their attempt, Avraham and Sarah's efforts were redirected inwardly. G-d sent them to Canaan. They sent away Yishmael. They focused on raising Yitzchak. When it came time for Yitzchak to marry, Eliezar was sent to Avraham's family of origin to find the Rivkah component of the national equation.

With the birth of their twin sons it became apparent to Rivkah and Yitzchak that there were two possibilities for the future of their children and the future of the world. Yakov and Eisav would either join as one in the forming the core of the Jewish nation; or, they would have to go their separate ways - one to become Israel and the other to become Saeir. Had they joined together, Yakov would have married Rachel and Eisav would have married Leah. Because Eisav chose to go his own way and not join Yakov in building the Jewish nation, Yakov purchased Eisav's birthright. Along with the that purchase came the necessity for marrying both Rachel and Leah.

Did it have to be all or nothing in dealing with Eisav? Could there have been another option?

I believe that there could have been another option for dealing with Eisav.

Why were Yakov and Eisav twins? We can assume that their twinship was central to their unified destiny. Twins are often seen as "the same;" however, in truth they are very individual. Yet, the twin relationship suggests a greater sameness than might otherwise be assumed in non-twin siblings.

Yakov and Eisav were as dissimilar from each other as any two siblings might be. The Torah describes Yakov as scholarly and spiritual, "a complete person (without blemish) who dwelled within the tent (of study and prayer)." Eisav is described as "a man knowledgeable in the ways of hunting and trapping, a man of the field." Yet, they were twins. Each was intended to bring his unique talents and strengths to the table of nationhood. It was to be as Yitzchak finally declared, "the voice of

## Yakov and the hands of Eisav!"

Given their differences and given their joined potential, we begin to understand Rivkah's loving focus on Yakov and Yitzchak's loving focus on Eisav. Each undertook to train the other child to recognize and appreciate his twin sibling's uniqueness, both strengths and weaknesses. However, regardless of their intent, they only succeeded in imbuing Yakov with devotion to Avraham's legacy and the joy of being chosen as G-d's partner. Eisav quickly moved away from the teachings of his parents to forge his own self-serving destiny.

Eisav's defection from the teachings of his parents was true in relation to Yitzchak and Rivkah. It did not have to be true in relation to his brother Yakov. Yakov, the spiritualist and perfectionist, the scholarly and the truthful, was in the position to affect the greatest changes in his twin brother. As the twin, he innately understood Eisav's challenges. As the twin, he could have positioned himself as Eisav's best friend and confidant. However, that was not the way Yakov was thinking. Yakov saw the immediacy of his calling as the future father and leader of the Jewish nation and focused all his time and energy on perfecting himself for that mission.

In analyzing his potential partnership with Eisav as co-founders of the Chosen People, Yakov saw only disaster. He saw the monumental strengths and qualities of Eisav being perverted for evil and godlessness and knew that it was up to him to save the future. He could not allow Eisav to be his partner! He had to buy out his genetic options in the future corporation! Granted the opportunity with the bowl of red lentils to buy out Eisav, he grabbed the chance and ran with it. However, there could have been a different approach.

Given that Eisav was finally in a vulnerable position and asking for Yakov's help, Yakov might have maximized the opportunity to establish a friendship between them. Instead, Yakov (understandably and justifiably) acted in response to his own developing sense of identity and responsibility and moved to protect the future of "his people."

We see later that the sale of the birthright remained an issue for Eisav. Upon realizing that Yakov had taken the blessing, Eisav proclaimed (48 years later), "He was named correctly! He duped me twice! First the birthright and now the blessing!" Who knows how Eisav might have responded if Yakov, his perfect twin brother, had (48 years earlier) extended his hand in acceptance and friendship?

The truth is that if not for this week's Parsha, Yakov's battle with the Angel of Eisav, and the physical hurt that Yakov suffered, we could not begin to blame Yakov. In fact, the Torah never implies any direct criticism of Yakov and his single-minded devotion to the protection and purity of his future family and nation. However, he was wounded in the climactic confrontation. Yakov did suffer pain and harm. Why?

I would like to suggest that Yakov suffered in the battle because he did not attempt to change Eisav. He rightfully focused inwardly on his own development and protection, as had been done by his parents and grandparents before him. He did so with unswerving, constant, vigilance; however, in so

doing he lost the possibility of maybe influencing his twin brother and keeping him as part of the nation's initial equation. In so doing he lost the possibility of having Eisav as a partner rather than an enemy.

Why the Gid Hanashe? Why was Yakov harmed in the sciatic nerve?

When Moshe had his first encounter with G-d, he was instructed to remove his shoes. G-d wanted Moshe to be in touch with the ground, not removed from it. G-d's mandate to the creature that He had formed from the earth was to use the divine qualities of his mind and heart to elevate the materialistic, physical earth in service to G-d. (Note: Only the human walks in an upright elevated stance.)

It is similar to the concept of the Mizbeach - Alter that must be formed from a pile of stones or a pile of dirt. There too the idea is the elevation of the earth through service to G-d. Therefore, we can suggest that the legs that connect us in our upright stance to the ground are symbolic of our mission in this world to sanctify the physical world in service to the Divine.

The Medresh regarding Shimshon - Samson, further supports this. The Medresh says that Shimshon, the great, mighty, invincible, long-haired warrior was "lame in both his legs." Understandably, the Medresh cannot be explained literally. My teacher, Rav Moshe Eiseman Shlita explained that the Medresh is telling us that regardless of how the prophet describes Samson and his actions we must start our study of Shimshon with the premise that Shimshon was absolutely pure and spiritual, removed from the "legs" that bind us to the materialism of this world.

Furthermore, the famous Talmudic story of Hillel and the Convert focuses on the "teaching of Torah while standing on one leg." Hillel answers the Convert, "That which is hateful to you do not do to your friend - that is the whole Torah - the rest of the Torah is an extension of that principle."

Hillel understood the Convert's request, "Teach me the Torah while standing on one leg" as referring to the two halves of the Torah: (1) the laws governing social interaction, and (2) the laws governing our relationship with G-d. The convert was referring to those two halves as the "two legs of the Torah." The Convert was asking Hillel which leg of the Torah was most important, the social or the devotional? Hillel answered that the essence of the Torah was the laws governing social interaction, rather than the laws governing our relationship with G-d. Both must be studied and both must be performed; however, the social is the more immediate for accomplishing our mission in this world.

Hillel's focus on the socially interactive Torah supports the mission and legacy of Avraham. If we are to reflect G-d in this world it will be first and foremost through the manner that we interact with our fellow human beings. Therefore, the "legs" of the human symbolize the two halves of the Torah, and the damage that Yakov suffered to one of his legs may reflect critically on one of those halves.

Yakov's relationship with G-d was perfect. He was the "complete person (without blemish) who dwelled within the tent (of study and prayer)." Therefore, the area of concern could not have been

between Yakov and G-d. Therefore, it must have been the one leg symbolizing the laws governing his social interaction. Therefore, Yakov was punished in his one leg for not attempting to influence his twin brother and keep him within the fold.

Yakov's encounter with Eisav was the final stage of his transformation from Yakov - the one half of the Jewish people, to Yisroel - the complete progenitor of the Jewish nation. Fundamental to that transformation was Yakov fully embracing G-d's mandate to represent the Divine in this world. Yisroel must be able to do battle with all elements of this world, the spiritual potential of the human creature as well as his physical limitations. Yisroel must be able to love and therefore influence every human being, Jew and non-Jew alike.

Commemorating the importance of the Jewish mission to teach both halves of the Torah, especially the half of social responsibilities, G-d prohibited the children of Yakov / Yisroel from eating the sciatic nerve that runs through the hind legs of an animal and was damaged in Yakov's battle with Eisav's angel. Had Yakov attempted to influence his twin brother, who knows, there might never have been a need for the battle.

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