

# CREATING HOLINESS

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Our father Abraham had the greatness and ability to transform three seemingly Bedouin Arabs into angels when they visited his home. In this week's parsha, Eisav has the destructive quality of converting, according to one Midrashic interpretation, the angels that Yaakov sent to greet him into people of force and violence. The former angels literally beat up on Eisav's men in order to make Eisav think twice about attacking Yaakov.

The lesson here is obvious. Human beings have the ability to sanctify or diminish holiness as they choose. There are homes that have the ability to structure angels and there are societies that demean and diminish even originally holy creatures into violent demons. The problem with Eisav is that he is interested in holiness and spirituality. But he is unwilling to pay the price to obtain them, to forgo his temporary wants and violent means of satisfying these urges. Even the angelic ideas that enter his house and society somehow become perverted into struggles and violence.

Eisav preaches love and peace and yet engages in constant strife and war. Some of the Chasidic masters interpreted Yitzchak's blessing of "the hands are the hands of Eisav and the voice is the voice of Yaakov" as being completely directed towards Eisav. Eisav possesses "the voice of Yaakov" as well, but he completely negates the holiness and purpose of that voice by using "the hands of Eisav."

It is not the mere idea of holiness that carries the day. It is the practice of holy behavior that matters most. A famous rabbi in America when once interrupted in the midst of his impassioned sermon by a crying child stated: "Crying children like all good ideas should be carried out." How true!

This attitude of Eisav, preaching spirituality and goodness but not really practicing it, is very prevalent in today's world. It is also unfortunately present in our Jewish world. Everyone speaks about spirituality and Torah while the behavior of many within the Jewish world is contrary to the tradition, values and lifestyle of Torah. The voice of Yaakov must also be consistent with the behavior of Yaakov - of the gentle person who dwells within the tents of Torah and tradition - in order for it to be truly heard.

A sham pretense of holiness, a faith that is held captive to current and temporary social whims has little chance of ultimate meaning and survival. Judaism strives to raise ordinary people to the levels of angelic behavior. It never compromises on those goals though it fully recognizes that not everyone can ever achieve them. But it is only by aiming for the highest standards, even if we fall

short of them at times, that we ordinary humans can become more angelic.

By compromising standards we end up emulating Eisav and reducing possible angels into unworthy human beings. How sad it is to let such opportunities to achieve greatness slide by us because of apathy and lack of self confidence and pride. Let us always follow Avraham and avoid Eisav's weaknesses.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

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