

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THE EISAV OF TODAY?

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

The **Ramban** writes in his introduction to Parshas Vayishlach that this parsha is a prime example of a theme that recurs throughout sefer Bereishis. Everything that happened to our Avos, forefathers, foreshadows that which will happen to their children (*ma'aseh Avos siman l'banim*). This parsha is a guide on how to deal with the hatred of Eisav's descendants, from the Roman Empire to the Western world.

This parsha instructs us how to deal with Eisav on both a physical and spiritual level. On a physical level, Yaakov prepared for Eisav in 3 ways. He davened to Hashem to be saved, he sent gifts to Eisav to appease him, and he planned for battle.

In fact, the **Ramban** cites a Midrash that before Rabbi Yannai would meet with the Roman authorities, he would review Yaakov's meeting with Eisav in Parshas Vayishlach. Many later Torah leaders did the same.

During WWI the yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim zt"l was in the city of Smilovitz. There was a Russian officer in the city who persecuted the yeshiva students. The Chofetz Chaim zt"l endorsed a plan to bribe the officer. They tried but the officer refused the bribe. The people returned to the Chofetz Chaim zt"l for advice. He told them to try Yaakov's second approach of "beseeching" the officer to accept the bribe. The people followed this advice and pleaded with the officer until he finally accepted the gift. From that point on, he became a friend of the yeshiva (Talelei Oros by Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rubin)

The **Torah** (Bereishis 33:14) says, "Let my Master [Eisav] go before his servant, and I [Yaakov] will go at my own pace." **Midrash Rabba** (78:14) gives deeper meaning to this dialogue between the two brothers (see also **Yefe Toar** and **Maharzu**). In one part of the conversation Eisav asked Yaakov, "Why do you suggest that you can travel at a leisurely pace?" Is this the correct approach to go quietly? "Aren't you afraid of the marauders and bandits and pirates?" Yaakov

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(Bereishis 33:14)*

answered, "I will go at my own pace. I will not start up with the haters of Israel. I will not flaunt myself in front of the non-Jew and give him a motive to be jealous of me."

Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz zt"l says that this Midrash is teaching us how to deal

with our enemies. Generally, we should not fight them head on and make public demonstrations. [Although, obviously, there are times that we have no alternative but to fight.] In general, we should respond quietly, try diplomacy, and at times, even run away. The way to deal with Eisav is not always with strong-arm tactics.

Rav Shimon Schwab zt"l also said that quiet diplomacy is the best route to take.

That is how to deal with Eisav on a physical level. How do we deal with Eisav on a spiritual level?

After Yosef was born, Yaakov told his wife Rochel that this was the opportune moment to return to Eretz Yisrael and face Eisav (Bereishis 30:25). **Rashi** comments that until Yosef was born, Yaakov could not face Eisav. The pasuk in **Ovadiah**(1:18) says, "The House of Yaakov shall be fire, and the House of Joseph flame, and the House of Esau shall be straw..." **Rashi** continues, "Fire (Yaakov) that has no flame (Yosef) has no effect at a distance." After Yosef was born, Yaakov knew that it was time to deal with Eisav.

There is a famous Chazal that the descendants of Eisav will only be given over to the descendants of Rochel. What is it about Yosef that can overcome the peril of Eisav? **Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan** quotes the **Shem MiShmuel** who gives a beautiful answer that instructs us on a very important concept of life. The

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

Shem MiShmuel points out that names in Tanach are not arbitrary labels but are very meaningful. Names define the essence of the person. He says that the name, Eisav, comes from the word “*asui*”, fully done. When Eisav was born, he didn’t look like an infant. He was like a complete individual. The spiritual threat that Eisav provides is a threat called “*asui*”, I am complete. I am finished. One who feels that he is perfect and has no room for improvement is what an Eisav is about. The danger is when one feels that he is fine, that his middos and character are fine, that there is no room for improvement, and that he is perfect.

This is the spiritual danger that Eisav provides. It is the complacency that one is totally fine, with no need to improve!

The opposite end of that spectrum is Yosef. His name alludes to the constant need to add on to, to be “*mosif*” and grow from where one is today.

Anyone who thinks that he can remain on the spiritual level where he currently is, without trying to become better will eventually descend. One either ascends, or he automatically descends. It is like trying to go “up” on an escalator that is going “down”. If one doesn’t move up, he will go down. The only way to go up is if one exerts himself. Recognizing the need to make a maximum effort is the only way to ascend. This is the spiritual antidote to the philosophy of Eisav. One must constantly try to improve. One can’t remain stagnant. One must be constantly growing in Torah and mitzvos,

Let us take the lessons of our forefather, Yaakov, to heart, to learn how to deal with the descendants of Eisav on a physical level and on a spiritual level. We should always look to grow in Torah learning, mitzvah performance, and in character development. Today we must be better than yesterday and tomorrow we must be better than today! That is how we combat Eisav on a spiritual level.

in spirituality and in good middos. (based on Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Torah.org)

Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen (Aish.com) quotes a beautiful **Ksav Sofer**. The **Torah** (Vayikra 16:18) says, “*Perform My Laws, and guard My Statutes, to go in them, I am Hashem.*” The words, “to go in them” is unclear. What is that adding to the command to observe the Torah? The **Ksav Sofer** answers by explaining that the opposite meaning of “going” is “*omed*”, which means standing. It is used in relation to angels. Angels “stand” in the sense that they remain stationary in their spiritual level. They have no connection to the concept of “growth”. Therefore, in contrast, the Torah tells us, human beings, are to be in a state of “going”. That means that we must constantly strive to improve our spiritual level and not stagnate.

We see from the **Ksav Sofer** that in addition to keeping the mitzvos, one must constantly strive to go forward in his Divine Service and that “standing still” is not an option. There is no such concept as remaining on the same spiritual level. One is either going forward or backward.

Why is it that when a person makes no active effort, he goes backwards as opposed to staying in the same place? The reason is that the *yetzer hara* makes a constant effort to lower a person’s spiritual level. Therefore, if the person is not making any active effort to go forward, then it is inevitable that his spiritual level will decline.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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