

The “Esavs” and the “Ya’acovs” of Today

Haftorat Parashat Toldot

Malachi Chapter 1:1-2:7

This week’s haftorah touches upon a question I received from one of my readers, regarding Rivkah’s binah, which I highlighted in my commentary of last week’s haftorah (see the comments on my blog). Our haftorah spells out what is hinted in the Torah portion regarding the truth of Rivkah’s perception concerning her sons. Hashem clearly validates Rivkah’s affinity for Ya’acov, while outrightly condemning Esav. However, even Esav has redeeming qualities. “For there was venison in his mouth,” can be understood to refer to holy sparks concealed within his head, which was buried in the Machpelah cave. Read on to learn about the “Esavs” and “Ya’acovs” of today and how to elevate the sparks of Esav.

“...I loved Ya’acov, but I hated Esav...”

This week’s *Haftorah* opens with the Prophet Malachi bringing to our attention the tremendous love Hashem has for Ya’acov and his children, contrasted with how He hates Esav, his twin brother. No matter how much Ya’acov’s offspring – the Jewish people – sin and shows lack of honor, we remain Hashem’s selected people for eternity. When Hashem admonishes us and punishes us, it is only because of His great love for us. “I loved you, said Hashem, but you said, ‘How have You loved us?’ Was not Esav a brother to Ya’acov? Says Hashem. Yet, I loved Ya’acov, but I hated Esav, and I made his mountains desolate and his heritage into [a habitat for] the jackals of the desert” (*Malachi* 1:2-3). According to Rashi, Hashem’s love of Ya’acov’s descendents is expressed through His giving them the most pleasant land – the Land of Israel; and His hatred of Esav’s descendants is expressed through pushing them away from the Land of Israel, for the sake of Ya’acov.

Rivkah’s Perception and Unconditional Love Reflected in Hashem’s Love of Israel

Malachi rebuked the Jewish People for not treating the Temple with proper reverence, and the *Kohanim* (priests) for offering blemished animals on G-d's altar. Nevertheless, the selection of the Jewish people can never be rescinded, since Rivkah ensured that Ya’acov rather than Esav received Yitzchak’s blessing to continue his spiritual mission. While Yitzchak was blinded by the honor Esav showed him (Rashi 25:27 and 28), Rivkah was able to see through the façade of Esav’s politeness and understand the true nature of her children. “And Yitzchak loved Esav because he was hunting with his mouth, but Rivkah loves Ya’acov” (Bereishit 25:28). Whereas Yitzchak’s love is written in the past tense (“loved”), Rivkah’s love for Ya’acov is written in the present (“loves”). According to *Kli Yakar* Yitzchak’s love for Esav was conditional, he only loved him when he brought him food, but Rivkah’s love for Ya’acov was unconditional and therefore beyond time. Her unconditional love described in this week’s *parashah* is reflected in Hashem’s unconditional love for Ya’acov’s descendants as described by Malachi in this week’s *Haftorah*.

Distinguishing between the “Esavs” and “Ya’acovs” of Today

It is not incidental that this week’s *Haftorah* is taken from the Book of *Malachi*, the last of the prophets and a member of the *Anshei K’nesset HaGedolah*, (The Men of the Great Assembly). They

defined the contents of the *Tana"ch* (Hebrew Bible), realizing that the Spirit of Prophecy was about to withdraw from the Jewish People for an extensive period. During our long exile at the hand of Esav's descendants, it is difficult not to be blinded by the glimmer of exterior accomplishments. Material goods and comfort-craving have become the underlying motive for the vast assimilation that we witness in the Western world. Ya'acov's descendants have readily joined the ranks of Esav at the fancy shopping malls, football games, television sets, and gourmet restaurants. Even the Torah true families in the Western World are not shielded from the powerful influence of the enticing "*Esavness*." At this time we are reminded not to be like "Yitzchak [who] loved Esav because he was hunting with his mouth" – i.e. trapping him with words (Rashi), or enticing him with advertisements for all kinds of goodies. Rather, we women must strive to be like Rivkah and see through the trappings of exterior gloss and "love Ya'acov." Instead of amusement-parks, circuses and operas, we yearn for the "Voice of Ya'acov" – the holiness of Torah learning and *tefilah* (prayer).

Elevating the "Hands of Esav" Without Compromising Our "Voice of Ya'acov"

In this week's *Haftorah*, Hashem confirms Rivkah's perceptiveness, by echoing her choice of affection "...but Rivkah loves Ya'acov" with Hashem's proclamation, "...yet, I loved Ya'acov." Hashem's love of Ya'acov is due to his devotion to Torah and mitzvot. Esav, on the other hand, is detested "...but I hated Esav..." because of his conniving self-indulgence and cruelty. Despite the contrast between Ya'acov and Esav, the fact that they were twin brothers, teaches us how difficult it can be to tell them apart. At times, there is only a hair's breadth of difference between using secular knowledge, the internet, and movies in the way of Ya'acov rather than that of Esav. Everything in the secular world is at our disposal to elevate and serve Hashem, as long as we ensure that it remains the exterior "vessel" rather than interior the "light" for us. When Rivkah dressed Ya'acov up as Esav, she empowered Ya'acov and his descendants to use the mantle of Esav, as long as it remains an exterior garment, for Torah and Mitzvot. "The voice is the voice of Ya'acov, but the hands are the hands of Esav" (*Bereishit* 27:22). As long as we ensure that our inner voice of Torah and *tefilah* remain pure and unaffected by "the hands of Esav" with which we connect to the world, then indeed, we, have the ability to use the tools available in the modern world. Unfortunately, "the hands of Esav" easily lure us to becoming trapped in exterior impressive wrappings such as hedonistic indulgence and honor seeking, causing us to choose secular degrees and over the pursuit of holiness. Let us tap into Rivkah's ability to distinguish between the "Esavs" and "Ya'acovs" of today, and keep our inner purity intact!