

TOLDOS (GENESIS 25:19-28:9)

Double Trouble

2000 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

This week we are introduced to twin brothers with almost nothing in common -- "*Esau, the expert in hunting, a man of the field; and Jacob, a pure-hearted man, who dwelled in the house* (of Torah study)." (Genesis, 25:27)

Esau was the outdoorsman, Jacob was the scholar. Esau was irreverent and in pursuit of all of the physical pleasures of this world, moral or otherwise. Jacob was the righteous son who walked in the ways of his illustrious forebears, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca.

Jacob is the father of our people; Esau is the ideological father of the anti-Semites of the world. Indeed, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai tells us in the *Sifri*, "Esau (as well as his disciples) is a sworn enemy of Jacob (Israel)."

Being a crafty individual and a con man of the highest order, Esau managed to convince his father Isaac that he was righteous and deserving of Isaac's blessings. Rebecca, however, having grown up with a brother like Laban (more about him next week), knew a phony when she saw one. With Divine assistance, Rebecca assisted Jacob in receiving the blessings that were rightfully his.

Despite his wickedness, Esau appreciated the value of a blessing from a holy man like his father, and vowed to take revenge: "*The days of mourning for my father are coming soon; then I will kill my brother Jacob.*" (27:41)

One Mitzvah that was very important even to a scoundrel like Esau was honoring his father; he would never do anything to hurt Isaac. He would wait patiently for his father's death before murdering his brother. But why did he say, "*The days of mourning for my father are coming*"? Why didn't he just say, "When my father dies, I'll kill Jacob?" Why the emphasis on mourning?

The *Kli Yakar* explains in his commentary that Esau was well aware of the nature of the blessing that Isaac had given to Jacob. He understood that protection from his enemies would only come when he would involve himself in the study and observance of Torah. If Jacob would become lax in his dedication to G-d's will, there were no guarantees of Divine protection from the enemies of Israel.

So what does this have to do with mourning? Upon Isaac's death, Jacob would begin the seven-day period of mourning known as *Shiva*. The *Kli Yakar* explains that Esau realized that a mourner during *Shiva* is prohibited from studying Torah! Esau understood that G-d would protect Jacob as long as he

studied Torah, and assumed that a break from this intensive involvement in learning G-d's ways would leave him vulnerable.

Logically, the Jewish People should not exist. After thousands of years of persecution, pogroms, public burnings, and Holocausts, Esau has still not succeeded, thank G-d, in his plot to eradicate our nation. Why not? Because of the Eternal Covenant of Torah. We have a mission in the world. It is our sacred duty to study, teach, and live G-d's Word. That is our purpose; that is our *raison d'etre*.

Are you frustrated over your inability to bring peace to the Middle East? Does it anger you that you are powerless to overcome the evils of "Esau" Arafat and his murderous mobs? YOU ARE NOT POWERLESS. Call your Congressman. Write to your Senator. Send a letter to the editor of your local paper.

THEN DO SOMETHING REALLY IMPORTANT!. Do a Mitzvah. Give some charity. Go to a Torah class, and then open a *Siddur* or a book of Psalms and pray your heart out. G-d has promised that He will never abandon Jacob. We have to make sure to keep our side of the bargain.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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