

**TOLDOS (GENESIS 25:19-28:9)**

## Walking the Talk

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

In an unprecedented act of "Divinely endorsed deception," Jacob embarks upon a mission to fool his father. Jacob is an honest and gentle man, while his brother Esau is a rogue and a fraud. Esau has managed to fool his blind father Isaac into thinking that he is worthy of receiving his blessing. Isaac asks his firstborn son to prepare him some food and bring it to him. Isaac tells Esau that when he comes back with the meal, Isaac will bless him.

Rebecca understands the true nature of her wicked son Esau. She has been given the prophetic message that this miscarriage of justice cannot be permitted to take place. She places goatskin on Jacob's smooth-skinned arms so that he will feel like his hairy brother Esau. She assures him that under these unusual circumstances, it is permitted to mislead his father into thinking that he is Esau. In fact, according to the *Midrash Tanchuma*, one of the reasons that Isaac lost his eyesight was so that Jacob would be able to receive his blessing.

Still, Jacob was uncomfortable with the ruse. He understood that this was necessary. His mother was a prophetess, and she said that this had to be done. Indeed, later on, when Isaac finally understood the whole story, he himself agreed that the blessings appropriately belonged to Jacob. Yet, pretending to be someone he wasn't didn't sit well with Jacob.

Esau had a very gruff way of speaking that Jacob refused to imitate. "*PLEASE get up*," (Genesis, 27:19) he said, when he brought some food to his father. (We see in verse 31, Esau's demand, "*let my father get up*," that the word "please" doesn't seem to be part of his vocabulary.) When Isaac asked how Jacob was he was so quick in preparing his meal, Jacob credited G-d for his success. G-d, too, was apparently not part of Esau's regular vocabulary. Jacob avoided saying anything to his father that was a blatant lie. He just couldn't do it.

Isaac was suspicious. Who WAS this young man who had brought him food, expecting a blessing? He invited his son to come closer so he could feel him. The goatskin disguise worked. The young man's arms were hairy, like Esau's. And yet . . . it just seemed a little . . . off. The manner of speaking just didn't sound like Esau's. Esau didn't talk that way!

*"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."* (Ibid, 22)

The *Kli Yakar* explains that Isaac was trying to resolve this contradiction. He interprets Isaac's question as, "which son is trying to fool me? Either the voice is the voice of Jacob, and he has his hands disguised, or the hands are the hands of Esau, and he is speaking in a more refined way than usual."

What was Isaac's conclusion? *He didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy like Esau's, and he blessed him.* (Ibid, 23)

When the voice says one thing and the hands say another, the hands speak louder than words.

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It is painful when we see our brethren act in an inappropriate manner. Occasionally we hear of Israelis who respond to Arab terrorism by engaging in terrorism of their own. They will justify their actions by quoting from the Torah that the Land of Israel has been given to us. Their mistake is that you can't act like Esau and pretend to be as righteous as Jacob. If you talk like Jacob but act like Esau, your hands speak louder than your words.

Occasionally we hear of charitable institutions that "stretch" the law in order to enhance their ability to do good. The end, they feel, should justify the means. The dean of my alma mater was approached with a "sweetheart deal." A potential contributor offered to give the yeshiva a ten thousand dollar donation in exchange for a twenty thousand dollar receipt. The yeshiva would receive a very nice donation, and the donor would secure a very hefty deduction. He was told to take his money elsewhere. If you talk like Jacob but act like Esau, your hands speak louder than your words.

We as Americans can all be proud of the way our country is fighting the war in Afghanistan. Who ever heard of dropping food packages to the population of the country we're fighting against? We're trying to kill our enemies! Who cares if a few civilians get killed in the process?!

We do. It's not good enough to speak against evil and to fight against evil. We must make sure that we ourselves do not become evil. If you talk like Jacob but act like Esau, your hands speak louder than your words.

It's not good enough to talk the talk. You also have to walk the walk.

Have a great Shabbos.

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