

"And the boys grew up and Eisav was a man who knew hunting, a man of the field; Yaakov was a wholesome man dwelling in tents. " (25:27)

With these few words, the *Torah* characterizes the essence of Yaakov and the essence of Eisav. Indeed, it seems that the text pinpoints the predominant difference between the two brothers. One question is readily apparent. Eisav was a *rasha m'rusha*, evil incarnate. Even before his birth, in his mother's womb, his wicked tendencies were already manifest. *Chazal* teach us that when Rivkah passed by a house of idolatry, Eisav gravitated towards it. All this while he was still in the womb! On the day that he sold his birthright, he committed five cardinal sins. Is this a man who should be described as "*a man who knew hunting*"? Let the *Torah* tell it like it is: Eisav was an evil man throughout his life. In contrast, Yaakov, who is the *bechir ha'Avos*, the chosen one of the Patriarchs, is described so humbly, "*A wholesome man dwelling in tents.*" One would think that referring to the Patriarch who fathered the *Shivtei Kah*, the twelve tribes, the individual who established the foundation of *Am Yisrael*, the *Torah* would present more noteworthy praise.

Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, infers a fundamental lesson from this ambiguity. The essence of an individual's greatness is not determined by actions but rather by his fundamental nature. Eisav was the requiem *rasha* because of his evil roots. We are inclined to believe that sin is determined by observable action. The greater and more iniquitous the behavior, the more pronounced is the sin and the more evil is the perpetrator. The truth is that one's evil roots -- and the actions that originate from them -- determine the level of one's malevolence. Eisav became a *rasha m'rusha* as a result of his origin. Had his roots not have been so corrupt, he would not have become the notorious Eisav. One does not become a sinner as result of his behavior. Rather, the innate evil within him is manifest through his actions. One whose roots are evil will become a sinner!

Let us return to the *Torah's* characterization of Eisav and Yaakov. When the *Torah* describes Eisav as "*a man who knew hunting*," it is emphasizing Eisav's roots, the source of his nefarious behavior. He was the essence of *sheker*, falsehood. He was a cunning hunter; trickery, deceit and treachery were the prime components of his personality. One who possesses such character traits is destined for evil. Eisav was exposed to a father and mother who were paragons of virtue and morality, as well as a grandfather who fought paganism and set the standard for the *middah* of *chesed*. He lived in a home in which the sight of Divine angels was commonplace. Nevertheless, he descended to the nadir of depravity. Unless the roots of such an individual are expunged, he does not have a chance. He can be aware of the greatness of Hashem and of the power of a *tzaddik's* blessing, as Eisav was. Yet, it all loses meaning in light of his compulsion to remain the epitome of evil. Eisav knew hunting; his cunning was his downfall, for it originated in falsehood and ended in blasphemy.

The *Torah* notes another aspect of Eisav's character. He was an "*ish sadeh*," a man of the field. *Rashi* interprets this to characterize a man of leisure who hunts to his heart's content. Eisav led an

easygoing lifestyle, rejecting the yoke of responsibility, doing whatever he pleased. He lived for the moment, ignoring the consequences tomorrow might bring. This frivolous attitude has become common. Such an absence of focus stems from an individual's lack of maturity. Fun is not an intrinsically negative concept, providing that one establishes and adheres to appropriate limits. One who disdains responsibility reverts to childishness, ignoring the consequences of his actions. At times, children may do terrible things, paying no attention to the person whom they have hurt or the seriousness of the injury. So, too, the *"ish sadeh"* does whatever he wants, wherever he desires to do it --regardless of whom he has affected.

Eisav was a man of the field who lived for today with no thought of tomorrow. He disdained authority, ignored responsibility, and scoffed at retribution. Do we have to search far to find this type of person or this attitude? Indeed, without realizing it, many fall into this category. Whether it is individuals who spurn responsibility, or others who simply refuse to grow up to accept the role of mature individuals, a drop of "Eisav" exists in many of us. It has become a trait to which some aspire. Our society has venerated those who have lived without fear of consequence, acted without compunction or restriction, responding with utter contempt towards those who scrutinize their behavior.

Horav Levinstein suggests that actually Eisav's characteristics are interrelated one to another. One who is truthful is concerned with the future. He sees the underlying goal in every act. Therefore, he seeks to reconcile the present with the future. The liar lives by, and for, the fleeting moment. His life is one of consummate deceit toward others, but ultimately he deceives himself the most.

Yaakov *Avinu*, the *"ish emes,"* man of truth, who dwelled in the tent of *Torah*, knew the essence of life. He apportioned his time wisely, realizing that every minute was an eternity in a spiritual sense. He truly lived for the future. The reality of the present is found in its function as an investment in the future.