

And Eisav saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Yitzchak, his father...He took Machlas, the daughter of Yishmael...in addition to his wives, as a wife for himself. (28:8,9)

Thus ends part one of the narrative about Yaakov and Eisav. Many commentators have devoted much to telling about their relationship. Their apparent discord climaxed when Yaakov received the *berachos* in Eisav's place. This incident provoked Eisav's anger, and hatred toward Yaakov, to the point that Eisav took it upon himself to kill Yaakov. While Yaakov fled Eisav's fury, Eisav decided to take another wife for himself. Does the *Torah* present this in accurate chronological sequence or simply as an historical vignette about Eisav? The *Shem Mishmuel* opines that Eisav's decision to marry another wife was a critical component in the sequence of events. Indeed, this action defines his true character. He thought that by changing his wife, his fortune would improve!

When one perceives that he has been punished, he should examine his actions. What could he have done wrong that would warrant this extreme response from Hashem? How could he have improved his behavior? One should pursue self-improvement after he notices that his life is not proceeding as it should.

This course of action was above Eisav's comprehension. When something went wrong, he immediately found fault in someone else. He projected the blame on everyone but himself. He was so evil that he could not imagine that he was responsible for his own misfortune. His pagan wives must have been the cause. He viewed the problem to be external, never involving himself. First the *Torah* recounts all that transpired between Yaakov and Eisav, highlighting Eisav's blatant display of evil. The *Torah* proceeds to summarize the story by detailing the character flaw that was the source of Eisav's downfall: his inability to acknowledge his own faults. This flaw, says the *Shem Mishmuel*, is inherent in Eisav's name. The name Eisav has the same Hebrew letters as the word "*asu*", which means made/completed. Eisav viewed himself as complete, lacking nothing, having no need for self-improvement. The numerical equivalent of Eisav is 376, the same as the word "*shalom*," peace, wholeness. Eisav was at total peace with himself. He saw nothing wrong with what he was doing. He always blamed someone else. This Eisavian character is the work of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, that always finds ways to fool us into believing that we can do no wrong. How often do we seek to justify our iniquitous actions? How often do we refuse to accept responsibility for the wrongs that we have perpetrated? We simply divorce ourselves from our deeds and continue blaming everybody but ourselves.

Interestingly, Eisav did not rid himself of his previous wives. He simply added another one to this clan. Despite their insidious idol worship and his father's apparent disdain for them, he could find no fault in them other than their Canaanite heritage. Consequently, he took a new wife of Abrahamitic descent for child-bearing purposes, while continuing to retain his original pagans.

Eisav's myopia clouded his vision of right and wrong.

Yaakov's name defines his character. The name Yaakov is derived from *akeiv*, heel. The Patriarch viewed himself as lowly, always in need of greater achievement, never satisfied with his present accomplishment. He sought to climb to greater heights in his quest for closeness to Hashem.

The disparity between Yaakov and Eisav should serve as a lesson for us all. Eisav's ruin resulted from his refusal to examine his own mistakes. He always blamed someone, or something, else for whatever wrong for which he should have found the source within himself. Yaakov, who serves as the standard from which we should all learn, teaches us the ability to scrutinize our own behavior and to be on a constant vigil. Demanding self-improvement is the key to success as a *ben Torah*, as well as our survival as the Jewish nation.