

## **Eisav said to Yaakov, “Pour into me some of that very red stuff.” Yaakov said, “Sell, as this day, your birthright to me.” (25:30,31)**

On the surface, to the uneducated reader, the story of Yaakov *Avinu* purchasing the *bechorah*, birthright, from Eisav seems highly enigmatic. *Horav David Povarsky, zl*, compares it to a shrewd man who saw a young child playing with a bag of diamonds. The man offered to give the young boy a bag of chocolates in exchange for the diamonds. The boy jumped at the idea and readily made the trade. Clearly, we would look askance at such a person. How could he have the temerity to take such advantage of an unknowing child? Eisav was clueless concerning the value of the *bechorah*. When Yaakov saw Eisav's ambiguity, he decided to make a business deal, consisting of trading red lentil soup for the right of the firstborn. This is how it appears to the superficial reader. Such a skewed impression is possible if one has no idea of the stature of the *Avos*, if one has no clue what it means to grow up in the home of Yitzchak *Avinu* and Rivkah *Imeinu*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that Eisav had a very clear perception of the value of the *bechorah*. Indeed, Eisav was no fool. He understood the meaning of spirituality, eternity and the values associated with them. It is we who have no semblance of understanding the lofty plateau which our Patriarchs and Matriarchs attained. As such, Eisav knew quite well what he was eschewing for the proverbial bowl of soup. Furthermore, later on he reneged the sale and wanted his birthright back. So, what happened? Did he have a momentary lapse of perception? Did he lose his mind for a short while?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that this, unfortunately, is the extraordinary power of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. It is able to conjure up an image of a bowl of red lentil soup as being the ultimate paradise, to the point that Eisav was prepared to relinquish everything for it. When Yaakov made his presentation, Eisav was on a different plane. He was dreaming about his “dinner.” This is the power of “imagination,” which should be the *nom de plume* of the *yetzer hora*.

Even the smartest individuals can make unwise decisions when their physical desires play a role in their thinking process. This idea resonates with the notion that intellect alone is not sufficient to overcome the powerful pull of one's physical inclinations. The struggle that ensues between the *yetzer hora* and *yetzer tov* is ongoing, with the *yetzer hora* focusing on one's base desires, and the *yetzer tov* countering it with the intellect. Sadly, the intellect without the support of Torah study and *mussar*, character development, is outmatched. The *yetzer hora* does not pull punches; it employs every possible strategy to take down the individual.

Eisav did grow up in the home of Yitzchak and Rivkah, but the finest home is insufficient to deal with one's character deficiencies. Eisav was impulsive; thus, when he was hungry, this became his primary focus. The *yetzer hora* played him well, motivating his immediate physical desires to

overpower his rational thinking and understanding of the long-term consequences. Veritably, Eisav regretted his decision, but its consequences could not be undone.

We often make hasty decisions – motivated by immediate needs. When our common-sense returns, we regret what we did, but it has become too late. We must remember that true wisdom involves more than simple intelligence. It also encompasses one's ability to master his inclinations, so that the decisions he makes are not capricious, but rather, align with long term values and goals as the Torah dictates.