

Eisav and Yaakov – Twins By Birth Only

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Eisav is mentioned alongside Yaakov in three stories in Sefer Bereishit, serving to highlight the contrast between the brothers. In Parshat Toldot there is the story of the twins' birth and the sale of the birthright. At the end of the parsha is the story of Eisav being tricked out of Yitzchak's blessing followed by his threatening to kill Yaakov. This results in a twenty year period of separation, Yaakov in Charan, and Eisav traveling between Mount Seir and the Land of Canaan.

Even though Eisav is the catalyst for Yaakov's traveling to Charan, in the entire parsha of Va-Yeitzei, Eisav's name is not mentioned even once! Yet in the very first pasuk of our parsha, Yaakov is intent on no longer delaying the unavoidable meeting with his brother. Apparently, Yaakov had been planning for the inevitable reunion with his brother. He decides to send a *mincha*, a generous gift of animals, as a token of penance for taking Eisav's blessing. Eisav's response to the gift is to journey to meet Yaakov, bringing with him 400 men. As Eisav's intentions are not clear, Yaakov also prepares for war (*machane*, a switching of the middle letters of the word *mincha*), and of course prays to Hashem.

Interrupting the story of the reunion of the brothers is the strange episode of Yaakov's nocturnal fight with an angel. Yaakov interprets this fight as if he has fought Eisav and won, giving him self-confidence for the actual reunion. Eisav also seems to be subconsciously influenced by this fight, and based on the results decides that fighting Yaakov is futile and instead hugs him. Once again, the Hebrew words for the opposite reactions are only one letter difference – *va-Yeiveik* for touching in struggle and *va-Yechabek* for touching in an embrace. At the end of the fight, his name is changed from Yaakov, the trickster, to Yisrael, the honest leader. Eisav also now accepts that Yaakov rightfully deserves the birthright (*bchora*) and the blessing (*bracha*, again two similar sounding words). Just as he was willing to exchange his birthright with immediate gratification of a well desired meal, so too Eisav is willing to exchange his blessing with a generous monetary payment and accept his brother's forgiveness.

The end of our parsha returns to Eisav and gives a detailed review of his descendants. Yaakov has merited the blessing that he will inherit the land of Canaan, but in the meantime he is occupied with traveling, buying land and trying to control his family. It will be many generations until his blessing is fulfilled and there is a Jewish king in Canaan. Eisav, as usual, prefers immediate results. He voluntarily leaves the volatile land of Canaan to easily settle and build his kingdom in Mount Seir, which Hashem gives him as a temporary inheritance (see Devarim 2:5 and our Haftora, Ovadia 1:18-21). Eisav is the contrast of Yaakov, who in Lavan's house demonstrated his patience and his ability to dream big and fight for what he believes in. Eisav's self-serving attitude does obtain results; however, they are short-lived. May we continue to carry on the legacy of Yaakov, never giving up on our heritage and homeland, even when it takes a long struggle and lots of patience to succeed.