

# Honestly

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

This week's *parsha* introduces us to Yaakov and Eisov, whose struggle endures until the End of Days.

The differences between them were already apparent prior to their birth. One sought to escape to the *bais medrash* and the other was interested in *avodah zorah*. Yaakov was a *tzaddik tomim*, while his wicked twin brother, Eisov, presented himself as an upright person.

Yaakov distinguished himself through speech. He spoke softly, with respect, humility and empathy, as did his father, Yitzchok, and grandfather, Avrohom. Eisov had no use for anything holy, and glibly sold his *bechorah* to Yaakov for the symbolic price of some lentil soup. He lived a heathen life, though he conducted himself virtuously around his father.

After selling the *bechorah*, Eisov did not regret his action. The Torah informs us, "*Vayivez Eisov es habechorah* – And Eisov mocked what had been bestowed upon him."

*Baalei mussar* say that this is indicative of the reaction of people whose silly actions set them back. When a child loses a game, he invariably says, "I don't care that I lost. It was a dumb game anyway and I didn't even try to win." Bad people find excuses for losses and always blame their miscues on others.

An intelligent person regrets his mistakes and admits that he missed an opportunity. Eisov lacked the capacity for introspection. Instead of pondering

what he had done, he mocked the whole thing, quieting whatever soft voice of sincerity he had, before it could lead him to repent for what he had done.

The *parsha* tells us that while it appears that Yitzchok appreciated Eisov, the difference in speech and manner between his two sons was obvious to him. When Yaakov came to receive the *brachos* of “*Veyiten lecha*,” Yitzchok was confused, because he discerned a sincerity and heart in the voice. Although Yaakov was wearing the coat of Eisov, he spoke in the manner of Yaakov. “*Hakol kol Yaakov*.” Eisov, while begging his father for a *brocha*, was plotting Yaakov’s murder. His words were superficial and not reflective of what lay in his heart.

Words are everything to the offspring of Yaakov. Our manner of speech defines us. How we speak, the words we choose, and our tone of voice all matter. We are to be refined, disciplined and respectful. We respect people whose words are soft and thoughtful, not brash and flippant. We respect and promote men and women of truth, whose fidelity to honesty and tradition grounds them.

We are not meant to follow those with the quick put-downs and glib tongues. Negativity and cynicism may sound clever and bring popularity to the one who uses his intelligence to mock others, but we are to respect the one who works hard, speaks softly and truthfully from the heart, and seeks to do good. His life is one of finesse and accomplishment. It is he and people like him who embody the ideals of *Am Yisroel*.

Living in the *golus* of Eisov. we must ensure that we do not adopt his perfidious and disrespectful nature. Though we are under the heel of Edom, we have to distinguish between authenticity and fiction and remain loyal to the truth. We should not become like those who suppress the truth for ulterior motives.

In this country, and in others, the media controls the news and the way people think about what is going on. For example, last week, Congressional Republicans held a press conference to discuss Biden family corruption. It was mostly ignored in the media, and those who covered it did so to mock the Republicans. Most Americans don't know what was said at the press conference. All they know is that Republicans are extremist, anti-democracy conspiracists.

In another example, also last week, former President Trump announced that he will be running to get his old job back in 2024. This is not meant to advocate for him, but rather to make a point. He stood on his feet for an hour discussing issues and his positions on them. Nobody reported on what he said. There was no fair and balanced report on the announcement anywhere. Nobody gave an evenhanded account of what Trump accomplished as president and where he failed, as is customary in reporting on a candidate. The coverage devolved into a bashing contest of who could make more fun of Trump, mocking him and his followers. Additionally, nobody contrasted his performance with that of the current occupant of the White House and a likely opponent should Trump win his party's nomination.

The effect of the daily one-sided reporting is that tens of millions of people unwittingly develop opinions about people and issues that the media desires for them to have.

It is a world of lies, and those lies have an effect. Paint a person or a group or an issue in a negative light, and people will think negatively of them. Witness the religious community in Israel, constantly maligned and vilified in the mainstream media. Is it any wonder that outside of the religious areas, even well-intentioned people look down upon "the *chareidim*"?

Power and elections have become a game of manipulation. Those who are best at it get to govern, dominate, and even become popular. Nothing is about the truth.

This is not supposed to be our way. As heirs to Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, we are expected to be eminently truthful in all we do, the way we think, and the way we approach life. When we seek success in any field of human endeavor, in our daily work lives as well as in social and familial settings, we don't lie, cheat or obfuscate to get ahead and advance our theories, positions, business, or anything else.

From our mouths, pens, and computers, only truth should emanate.

In this week's *haftorah*, the *novi* Malachi repeats to the Jewish people Hashem's words, "I love Yaakov, and Eisov I hate..." But the *kohanim*, "*Amar Hashem Tzevakos lochem hakohanim bozei shmi*," they failed to demonstrate proper respect for Hashem and the *Mikdosh* (*Malachi* 1:2-6).

Understanding the admonition, and perhaps the connection to this week's *parsha*, is that the *kohanim* essentially earned their role and mission as an outgrowth of Yaakov's purchase of the *bechorah*. Originally, *bechorim* performed the holy functions, but when the *bechorim* did not conduct themselves properly, *kohanim* were chosen to replace them as attendants to Hashem.

The sale of the *bechorah* was rooted in the fundamental difference between Yaakov and Eisov. Yaakov was a man of respect, while Eisov epitomized ridicule and scorn. As the *posuk* says of Eisov, "*Vayivez Eisov*." The essence of his personality was derision. Thus, when the *kohanim* sinned and became "*bozei*

*Hashem,*” embodying Eisov’s characteristic of the *middah* of *bizayon*, they were no longer worthy of inheriting the gift handed down by Yaakov to serve in the *Bais Hamikdosh*.

We are *rachmonim*, *bayshonim* and *gomlei chassodim*, people of mercy, bashfulness and kindness. We are invested with sensitivity and compassion, and the words we use, our tone and our approach must be reflective of those traits.

The secret of using words well is believing in the intrinsic holiness of the people you are addressing. As the wisest of men wrote, *ma’aneh rach*, soft words, have the potential to be *meishiv cheima*, turn away anger, because they open the heart of the person you are speaking to and allow them to accept your message. Many of our leaders were soft people. They spoke softly and carried no stick. Through gently speaking words of truth, they were able to educate and inspire masses of people.

People of sensitivity see this. Eisov doesn’t see past the surface. He sees a red soup and refers to it by its color, saying to Yaakov, “*Haliteini na min ha’adom ha’adom hazeh... Al kein kara shemo Edom*” (*Bereishis* 25:30). Eisov and his offspring are referred to as “*Edom,*” because he referred to the lentil soup as “*edom.*”

By referring to the soup by its color, he exposed his own superficiality. He didn’t know anything about the soup other than that it has an appealing color. That was enough for him. He forsook his future for the momentary pleasure of something superficially appealing.

Edom, as a nation, fails to perceive beyond what it can touch and feel. Hence the fascination in our world with looks, color and presentation. There is no depth that's meaningful to them beyond the surface image.

Though we live in *Golus Edom*, we must ensure that we do not become enamored with – and influenced by – the external and the superficial, but we must remain purposeful and discerning people with content and depth. We must not permit ourselves to be misled by glib, empty rhetoric, half-truths and outright distortions.

As children of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, we are *shluchim* to continue their mission. We are to care about each other, and speak with love and soft words that people can understand and accept. As *maaminim*, we should be positive and hopeful, treating all people the way we want to be treated, no matter the occasion of our interaction.

Let us not be influenced by the dominant lies of the day. Let us use the measurements of Torah to assess the prevailing trends around us and find the moral courage to stand up for the truth, no matter how unpopular that may be.

We need to act as our *avos* and *imahos* did. We need to study the *parshiyos* of *Bereishis* with the depth they deserve and not be content with a superficial reading. There are many lessons there to enhance our lives.

The *posuk* (*Bereishis* 25:19-20) tells us that Yitzchok took Rivka, the daughter of Besueil of Aram and sister of Lovon, as a wife. *Rashi* explains that although we have already been told who Rivka was, the Torah tells us again about her father and brother and town to praise her, namely, that although she had a

wicked father and brother and came from a town of wicked people, she did not learn from them, but remained a virtuous person.

Rav Meir Soloveitchik elucidates further and cites the famous *Rambam* in *Hilchos Dei'os* (6:1) that man was created in such a way that his thoughts and deeds are influenced by friends, and people conduct themselves according to the customs of where they live. Therefore, a person must connect himself to the righteous and always dwell near *chachomim* to be able to learn from them, avoiding the wicked who are in darkness, so that he won't learn from them.

Rivka went against human nature. Although her family was evil and her neighborhood was evil, she didn't learn from them. Because she was able to triumph over human nature, she merited marrying Yitzchok and becoming one of the *imahos*. Just as Avrohom withstood the ten *nisyonos* and stood up to the world together with Sorah, so too, Rivka and Yitzchok had the strength necessary to confront and withstand the influences and pressures of the world.

In our day, as well, we must remain true to the heritage they bequeathed to us and be strong enough to resist the pull of our surroundings to engage in dishonorable, unethical, duplicitous, and plain old improper behavior.

To earn the *brachos* of *hatzlocha*, *nachas*, and spiritual and financial success, we must follow the example of our *avos* and *imahos*. Doing so will grant us the blessings of success, achievement and prosperity that they were rewarded with. *Amein.*