

Worlds Apart – Parashat Toldot

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At certain times in history, had things played out according to their natural progression, the world would have been altered forever. Such an event took place in this week's *parashah*.

Jacob is the quintessential Jew. He spent his days and nights toiling in Torah study while working on perfecting himself spiritually. He was so great that King David named the generation of spiritual seekers "Jacob", as it says, "Such is the generation of those who seek Him, those who seek Your face, Jacob, selah" (Psalms 24:6).

Although Jacob lived in this physical world, his soul constantly flickered Heavenward. He was able to joyfully leap above life's trivialities and trials because he lived with the knowledge that everything was God's will, meant for his eternal good.

Esau, on the other hand, was firmly grounded in this materialistic world. In Hebrew, Esau's name begins with the letters *Ayin-Sin*, which is similar to the word *ASiyah*, referring to our world, the World of Action, which is the lowest of all worlds. While God's presence and will is obvious in the upper worlds, the sheer materialism of our world causes God to seem hidden from us. Because Esau did not live with the same belief system as his brother, he did not have the skill set to elevate himself beyond the difficulties of this world. The result was a life lacking in meaning and joy. To fill the void, Esau filled his life with vanities and immorality.

But if their differences are so evident to us, why weren't they evident to their parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah? The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esau because he would "trap with his mouth" (Genesis 25:28). The Targum explains that Esau would feed Yitzchak from the animals he hunted. Could he really have bought Yitzchak for the price of a *fleishig* dinner?

As we all engage in work to one extent or another, we know that, unlike sitting in the tent of Torah and studying, work pressures us into being busy with myriad details. We become overwhelmed and find it difficult to remember that it is really God pulling the strings. Yitzchak knew that Esau, as his name implies, was a worldly person. But Yitzchak thought that Esau's role was to bridge the gap between God's will and His seeming hiddenness in this world.

Since Esau had fed his father, Yitzchak assumed that Esau would need his blessings in order to prosper so that he, Esau, could then support Yaakov. Charity, more than anything else, reflects our faith that wealth is directed only by God. By supporting a Torah scholar like Jacob, Esau would elevate the World of Action to serve as a catalyst for holiness, and reveal that even the most mundane things like money also reflect the will of God.

Esau therefore asked his father, "How does one tithe their salt and straw?" (*Tanchuma, Toldot* 8). While these items don't require tithing, Esau wanted to fool his father into thinking that he was interested in supporting the Kohanim to the highest degree. In the end, Yaakov was blessed with worldly wealth, and Esau's potential became our job as well.

Work and materialism threaten to put us under their spell so that we forget about God and revealing His presence in our lives. But when we remember that He is hidden in everything that we experience, and that everything He does is for our good, we can joyfully long and desire to experience His Oneness in every aspect of our lives. Then we can transform this world and its darkness and sorrow into a chariot for His light and glory. Amen!

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Areiv 3