

Parshat Toldot 5778

Malachi's message In this week's haftarah the prophet Malachi delivers a three part message to the Jewish People. The first picks up on the historical choice of Yaakov over Eisav, described in our Sedra. Malachi, conveying the word of G-d, describes the scope and eternal nature of this choice "...*Was not Eisav a brother to Jacob...yet I loved Jacob. But I hated Eisav and I made his mountains a desolation...*".

Abruptly, after describing the love of Yaakov (and by implication his descendants), and the relentless destruction that will be visited upon Eisav (and his descendants), the Navi turns to castigating the Jewish People, and the Kohanim in particular, for their flawed service of G-d. "*You bring abominable bread upon my altar...And when you bring a blind animal to slaughter, is it not evil? And when you bring a lame or sick animal, is it not evil? Offer it, if you please, to your governor - will he show you favour?...*" The Kohanim are called out for bringing defective offerings - offerings, as the rhetoric indicates that they would not dare bring to their flesh and blood rulers.

The haftarah concludes with a description of the manner a Kohein should adopt, modelled after their ancestor Levi "*The teaching of truth was in his mouth and no injustice was on his lips; he walked with me in peace and fairness, and he turned many away from sin...*"

Drawing the parts together I would suggest that the juxtaposition of these three elements of the prophecy is no accident. The implication is that when acting as described in part two, the Jewish people call into question the choice described in part one. In other words, instead of following the lead of their ancestor Yaakov, they have instead adopted the characteristics of Eisav, the despised brother. Thus, the message seems to be clear - adopt the characteristics of Yaacov, and avoid those of Eisav. But what are the characteristics of Eisav?

The insincerity of Eisav I would posit that the term that best captures these characteristics is insincerity. Eisav may well perform the actions required of him, but in a hollow fashion or worse, with ulterior motives, devoid of all internal commitment.

The Midrash describes Eisav seeking to present a pious facade to his father Yitzchak

by asking how to tithe salt, something there is no obligation to tithe. On its simplest level, the over-eagerness betrays a lack of sincerity - the excessive language is used to mask his real intent. This brings to mind the protestations of Goneril and Raegan to their father King Lear - whose excesses, to the discerning eye, hint at insincerity and the betrayals to come.

This, it seems, is the hallmark of Eisav - he presents himself as clean, worthy and sincere, when in truth he is anything but. The Jewish people are exhorted not to follow his example. When you bring a korban, they are told, understand what you are doing and why you are doing it. Let this understanding then be reflected in the manner in which you carry out the task, by bringing healthy, worthy animals, and not defective ones.

A practical example The Rambam, in Hilchot Shevitat Yom Tov (6:18) writes as follows:

"When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is not indulging in rejoicing associated with a mitzvah, but rather the rejoicing of his gut."

He brings as a source text a passuk from our haftarah [Malachi 2:3], "*I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival celebrations*". In light of the above analysis, it comes as no surprise that our haftarah is a source for this halacha. To indulge in a splendid yom tov feast without reaching out to those in need indicates a lack of awareness of what yom tov is about. Yom Tov is not merely an excuse to enjoy ourselves, but to meet with, and emulate, G-d; to appreciate the kindness He has bestowed on us, by sharing it with others.

Through taking to heart the Rambam's message - by performing mitzvot with sincerity and an understanding of the message they are intended to convey, we can merit to be worthy of Malachi's praise "*the teaching of truth was in his mouth*", walking with Hashem in truth, integrity and fairness.