

Ruach veRevach

Torah and Essentialism by R' Binjomin Szanto, Budapest

Eisav's Cities Reflect His Worldview

Eisav is defined by his relationship to *emet* and *olam haba*. He demands truth, but only from others – as we saw last week. His approach to the World to Come is very similar.

What he denies in principle, he leverages in practice.

When selling the birthright, he says:

"Behold, I am going to die – what use is the birthright to me?" (Bereishis 25:32)

Our Sages say that with this statement, he denied our fundamental belief in life after physical death (*Bava Basra 16b*).

He believes only in what he sees. He does not want to deal with what is abstract or

"philosophical."

In his eyes, Jacob is merely wasting his time when he deals with spiritual matters that are not directly and practically useful to society.

The Talmud already identifies the descendants of Eisav with the Roman Empire (*Megillah 6a-b*). Medieval rabbinic tradition continues this thread, tracing the line forward through Rome's successor: Christianity and the European-Christian civilization that emerged from it (e.g. *Ibn Ezra on Yeshaya 63:1*).

Yet many tend to think of Christianity as focusing on otherworldly reward and punishment, while Jewish philosophy focuses on this world.

Isn't this a contradiction? The answer is as above: by Eisav there is a distinction between what he preaches and how he acts.

Regarding the lentils he said:

"Pour down [my throat], please, some of that red stuff, for I am weary." (Genesis 25:30)

He explains his laziness and hedonism by his weariness. Hard work may be followed by well-deserved rest and pleasure.

This is an accurate description of several characteristics of the civilization surrounding us: if we have worked, then pleasure is due afterward.

This need fuels billion-dollar industries: entertainment and hospitality.

There is a market and demand for them. Whatever entertains, amuses, and literally helps to "pass" the time always finds plenty of buyers. We walk through the streets, and one opportunity follows another.

In contrast, Yaakov's path: the possibility of spiritual development, learning, and growth. In Eisav's countries, the more clearly it concerns spiritual interests, the fewer buyers and places we find.

The Western culture embodied by Eisav in theory adopts the belief in the afterlife inherited from Judaism. But in practice, it is the cityscape that testifies to what actually is in their people's hearts.

You are what you buy – and your cityscape reflects this too.

Rumbach Shul (Budapest): Shacharis 8 AM (Sun-Fri), Kabbalat Shabbat 6 PM,
Shabbos morning 9 AM (Mincha after kiddush / seudah).

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