
***Recurring
brotherly
conflicts...***

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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Toldot 5782



and the LORD answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." – **Bereshit**

25:23¹ Cain said to his brother Abel... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. **Bereshit**

4:8² And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him – **Bereshit**

37:4³ A plot of land or a kingdom, a woman or an object, the status of firstborn or an unjust inheritance, all give pretexts for conflict. We cannot avoid conflict when desires converge on the same object. It is difficult for the brothers to be

Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel...
וְאֶחָד־לֵךְ יַעֲקֹב אֶתְהָרִן וְיַעֲקֹב
אֶתְהָרִן בְּעֵינָב
Bereshit 25:26

aware of their symmetry, their reciprocity, the intense violence which is hidden behind their brotherhood,—an awareness which might spare them their confrontations—because they never occupy the same positions at the same time.— **Angel Barahona in From Cain and Abel to Esau and Jacob, Contagion Journal Vol 8, Spring, 2001**⁴

The rabbis indicate that it is not only Yaakov who is interested in matters of the spirit, but also Esav. The Midrash tells us that in their mother's womb, the brothers are fighting for both worlds (Avodah Zarah 11a). If Esav were only interested in this world, there would be no contest about the next world (i.e., spirituality). While Esav is not willing to give up this world in order to get a ticket into the next world, this does

not mean that he is automatically ready to forget about spiritual pursuits. It is in the context of the transformed Yaakov (i.e., Yisrael) that Netziv reminds us of the potentially symbiotic relationship that can exist between the descendants of Yaakov and the descendants of Esav, specifically embodied by Rabbi Yehudah haNasi (Rebbi) and Antoninus (Haamek Davar on Bereshit 32:25). The spiritual greatness of Rebbi was used to elevate Antoninus, while in turn Antoninus could provide for Rebbi's temporal needs (Avodah Zarah 10b). When the latter taught the former, the power and splendor of Rome was placed at the disposal of the Jewish leader. Seforno suggests that this

potential symbiotic relationship was what was envisioned by Yitzchak when he wanted to bless Esav with physical wealth and power (Sforno on Bereshit 27:29). –

Francis Nataf in *Redeeming Relevance*⁵
During the war, there were people wishing me death, wishing my son death, wishing my wife death in very graphic ways. In the past, I would go overseas and I would say, "Israel is like my family: we disagree, but we're all brothers." I can't say that anymore because life proves me wrong – **Etgar Keret**