Message from the Haftara

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Holding Fast to Truth in an Age of Deception

TO-L'DOT

The stories of Yaakov and Eisav in this week's parsha explore the tension between appearance and substance, deception and authenticity. The same tension continues in the haftara, where the prophet Malachi challenges the Jewish people to consider what it truly means to be God's chosen nation.

Yaakov's first appearance as a character in the Torah's narrative features him cooking a lentil soup (B'reishit 25:34). His older brother, Eisav, returning from the field exhausted, agrees to sell Yaakov the birthright in exchange for "some of that red stuff" [HA-ADOM HA-ADOM HAZEH]. It is that phrase, the verse informs us, that earned Eisav the name that would characterize the nation descended from him, EDOM (25:30).

We can infer that Eisav's choice of words in that instant was somehow deeply representative of his character. Perhaps by simply calling the soup "red" without giving any thought to its ingredients or taste, Eisav was showing a preoccupation with external appearance rather than acknowledging what lies beneath the surface.

None of us would think to call chicken soup "yellow soup". But Eisav possessed a superficiality that allowed him to only see with his eyes, and the Torah hints that this unwillingness to delve beyond the surface cost him his birthright. Eisav may have been physically older than Yaakov, but the Torah suggests that spiritual maturity, not physical seniority, determines who is worthy of God's inheritance.

The interplay between interior and exterior continues in the next story. Rivka, anticipating that Yitzchak will bless Eisav before his death, urges Yaakov to deceive his father by pretending to be Eisav. Putting hairy goatskins on his arms to cover his normally soft, bare skin, Yaakov takes advantage of his father's blindness and steals the blessings that were meant for his older brother.

The irony is striking. Yaakov and Rivka, having witnessed Eisav's preoccupation with outward appear-

ances, now resort to manipulating appearances themselves. And a careful reader will note that the outcome of this episode for Yaakov is not altogether positive.

At the beginning of Parshat Vayishlach, he will be forced to humiliate himself by at least symbolically returning the stolen blessing to his brother. And years later, Yaakov's own sons will deceive him using the blood of a goat, just as he once used goatskins to deceive his father. They will lead him to believe that his beloved son Yosef has been killed; inflicting a grief that will tear his soul apart.

Perhaps the lesson is that blessings acquired through deception cannot provide lasting fulfillment. Yaakov's story reminds us that the integrity of our actions matters as much as the blessings we seek to attain.

Our haftara, from the opening chapter of the book of Malachi, opens with God's proclamation of His love for Yaakov and His rejection of Eisav. But the prophet then veers into a seemingly unrelated subject, berating the kohanim for offering unfit and unworthy sacrifices – sick, lame, and blind animals that they would never offer as gifts to their mortal lords or governors. What connection hides between these two consecutive prophecies?

The answer lies in the distinction between outward form and inner substance. God's choice of Yaakov over Eisav was rooted in the younger brother's honesty and the depth of his perception, and invites us to consider what it means to be worthy of God's covenant. The kohanim in Malachi, however, betray those values by cynically offering their cheapest and worst animals as sacrifices. They preserve the outward forms of religious service while disregarding its substance. By offering God what they would never offer a worldly ruler, they reveal that their sacrifices lack respect and authenticity.

The juxtaposition of these prophecies reminds us that belonging to God's chosen people is not simply a matter of inheritance; it demands that we live with integrity. Ritual without commitment, and outward appearances without inner conviction undermine the values that should define our relationship with God.

As the people of Israel navigate an uncertain world filled with danger, division, and deception, the lessons of this week's parsha and haftara remain especially relevant. We live in an age when appearances can be manipulated, lies can be spread with lightning speed, and it is often difficult to distinguish between truth and misrepresentation. Our responsi-

bility as Jews is not merely to recognize these challenges, but to respond to them by upholding the values of honesty, integrity, and authenticity.

The prophet's challenge to the kohanim is ultimately a challenge to us all. We must strive to see beyond surface-level appearances ourselves, and ensure that our actions reflect the values we aim to represent. 