

Hunter's Deception (Toldot)

“Even the cunning are sometimes caught by those they think they can deceive.” — Aesop

To hunt skillfully, one must master deception. To lay a hidden trap, to conceal an ambush, to wait until the right moment to strike, all require subterfuge and the art of tricking one's victim into believing the situation is safe, secure, calm, when in fact it is imminently deadly.

The Bible, in introducing the sons of Isaac – Esau and Jacob, tells us that Esau was a hunter. Ibn Ezra (on Genesis 25:27) explains that it is coming to highlight Esau's deceptive nature. For Esau it was easy to lie, to lure prey into his clutches, to disguise himself, to blend into the foliage when necessary. He had the capacity to attack at a moment's notice, to kill his quarry. The Rabbis from the very outset deride such predatory characteristics.

As a contrast, Jacob is depicted as a mild, scholarly, tent-dwelling shepherd, not cut out for the hunt, for deception, for subterfuge. It is therefore the ultimate irony that Esau is tricked out of his ostensibly deserved blessing by his otherwise honest brother.

That sincere Jacob disguised himself, pretended to be Esau, lied to their father and thereby robbed the blessing from Esau the deceiver, could only have been utterly humiliating to a skilled hunter such as Esau.

Deceivers and hunters, watch out. The honest ones are the most dangerous.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the opening of Israel's embassy in Estonia.