

OUR STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Label Lam

"Eisav was a man who knew how to hunt; a man of the field. Yitzchak loved Eisav because he (Eisav) trapped (him) with his mouth". (Breishis 25:27-28)

"Eisav said; "Here I am about to die what good is the birthright to me?" He ate. He drank. He got up and left. He thus rejected the birthright". (Breishis 25:32:34)

There is a prominent principle to use when sorting out interpersonal problems and that is; who "owns" the problem? It's like going out to a restaurant with a tight-fisted friend or like the child's game of hot potato. Nobody wants to be left holding the bill or be tagged with hot potato burning in the hand. In the ancient and eternal conflict between Eisav and Yaakov we need to understand who owned not just the birthright but the problem, and why.

If we had to put Eisav on the couch we would find that he exhibits a classic "ego personality". Let us define. Those who exhibit the "ego personality" are externally oriented. Their eyes are always in the social mirror. That's where they mistakenly hang their hope for security. They would rather be thought of as being great than actually be great. They must engage in acts of deception to build up and maintain their constant need for external applause and public approval.

They will tend to lie and exaggerate remaining forever on the move, avoiding intimate relationships for fear of being discovered. Their goal is to impress their audience not to express themselves. They may seem to have made many friends as their need for approval grows but their method is one of control and manipulation rather than building trust and cultivating love. They are therefore, hopelessly lonely at the core and in continuous need of more money, position and status to be able to exert and maintain a powerful posture to fuel their superficial relationships.

Since their eyes are focused outwardly on the visible material world they will tend to compare and compete rather than develop their own unique potential. As in any other zero-sum game, other's successes and acquisitions are falsely perceived as somehow depriving them. They are busy finding fault and deficiencies in others in order to create unhealthy alliances based upon mutual weaknesses and dependencies. Therefore, as their ally seeks to become stronger and more self-reliant, they begin to feel vulnerable and threatened. The improvement is seen as a rebellion and a breach of loyalty.

They will tend to be filled with excuses choosing to blame others for their own failures rather than

learning and growing themselves. They are self centered and self-absorbed to the degree that others are only so many "means" to their personal "ends" and the relationship is never the goal itself. They will boast of their own accomplishments and speak mockingly about others. They will react with an intolerant rage when confronted with even helpful and loving criticism. They would rather die than admit they are wrong and they will attempt to turn over the world before they utter a word of apology.

They play a game of big numbers seeking to dazzle with statistics aggrandizing quantity rather than quality and volume as opposed to intrinsic value. They thrive in an environment when others are fearful and uncertain and they will often create situations in which chaos becomes their playing field. They may speak of peace and love and other high platitudes publicly but their actions will always contradict their words and reveal their true intentions.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter said that when he first started learning ethical teaching he became angry and bitterly disappointed with the world. After a while he was aggravated with himself and the world. After a long while he was only upset with himself.

If one studies the life and times of Eisav, the nation of Edom, as portrayed in the Torah, one can find evidence of the egoistic characterizations mentioned here. With a deeper look in the mirror, we can all find some way in which we have been seriously affected. It will then be easier to understand in which way this long and difficult exile is not mistakenly referred to as the exile of Edom. To the extent of the degree of self-recognition, the battle between Yaakov and Eisav of way back when will show itself as being in fact, still very much our struggle.

Good Shabbos!

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