

# THE JEWISH HALL OF FAME

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And HASHEM said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides will be separated; the might shall pass from one regime to the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."  
(Breishis 25:23)*

How do we make sense of this story? Why was the negative prophecy about Essau revealed to only one parent? Why did Rivka not inform her husband about the future difficulty? How could Rivka allow her husband to be continually tricked by Essau? Why did she wait for the very last moment before intercepting the blessing aimed at Essau? How could Isaac be so deceived? Who was it that Isaac thought was in the room when he felt the hands of Essau and yet heard the voice of Jacob?

The Rambam states a principle that a negative prophecy need not be realized. The classic example was with Yona and his mission to Ninveh. Once they got the message and responded appropriately then the threat of imminent doom was eased. If a doctor warns his patient not to eat a certain food because it may have hazardous consequences then as long as doctor's orders are followed tragedy need not occur.

Similarly, if Essau would have adopted a healthier and more submissive attitude toward Jacob; if he would have internalized the Torah he learned; if he could have transcended his ego, then both Jacob and Essau would have been co-equal founders of the Jewish Nation. Jacob would have been as the roots of the tree mining deep water of council and Essau would have been as the branches that bear the message to the world.

How did Isaac remain blind towards Essau's faults and why he was kept in the dark until the very-end? The story is told about a school teacher who received an apology from the principal in the middle of the school year, "I'm sorry for sticking you with the slow class." The teacher was shocked. "Slow class?" he wondered aloud. Taking out the original roster, he pointed to the numbers next to each name, "134, 125, 142, 151...This is the brightest academic group I have ever had the privilege to teach! Look at these IQ scores!" The principal took a long look at the page and declared, "These are not the IQ scores. These are the locker numbers!"

Sometimes it's important that only the administrator know what's in a student's file while the teacher remains blissfully unaware, if a child is to grow beyond limiting expectations. However the administrator is watching carefully to see that by the time diplomas and licenses are handed out the credentials are there.

Isaac was bribed by a parental desire to see that his child makes it. Any slight display of progress and effort is already a foreboding of success. There's a part of every parent that never gives up on his child, and rightfully so! Even at the last moment he had a hope that Essau would adjust himself to be more compatible with Jacob. So when he felt "the hands are the hands of Essau" while "the voice is the voice of Jacob" he naturally assumed that Essau had finally softened and "got it".

Rivka understood that by that time it was too late and dramatic intervention was necessary. Rivka did her job as the administrator waiting patiently, while Isaac worked with his son Essau hoping continuously and bribed daily by the desire not to lose his child. Rivka was anxious too for Essau to display more than a manipulative pandering to Isaac, getting the grades to please the system but never getting the real message.

In the end only Essau caused Essau to fail. By feeding lies to his father he tricked himself, playing into the illusion of success without ever having honestly changed. While he toyed with his father's hope he actually betrayed his trust. Even though Essau continually faults Jacob for his own failures, there is really only one person to blame why he remains a character of infamy and why his uniform was not enshrined in **The Jewish Hall of Fame!** Text Copyright &copy 2005 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.