

AGAIN AND AGAIN RATHER THAN...

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Essau saw that Isaac blessed Jacob and he sent him to Padan Aram to take for himself from there a wife, and he blessed him and he instructed him saying, "Do not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan!" And Jacob listened to his father and to his mother and he went to Padan Aram. And Essau saw that the daughters of Canaan were bad in the eyes of Isaac his father. And Essau went to Yishmael and he took Machlas the daughter of Yishmael the son of Avraham the sister of Navayos in addition to his wives for a wife. (Breishis 28: 6-9)

That he took in addition to his wives and he did not cast out the bad ones shows that he really cared more for his appetites than he did the will of his father. (Ramban)

Essau is compared to the pig in that he extends his hooves saying, "See I am pure!" So the generals of Essau steal and commit violence and portray themselves as Kosher. (Rashi)

Why is it necessary or productive for us to study the faults of Essau? The global answer may be that we find ourselves for two thousand in the fourth exile under the hegemony of Essau's descendant Edom -alias "Red". The more we can understand Essau's modes of operation the better equipped we will be in recognizing his deceptive tactics in order to defend and distance ourselves.

What a rare window we get into the psyche of Essau. We can easily observe the perverse quality of his value system. Essau had spent his entire life tricking his father and the world that he was a holy roller. Rather than beautifying himself he was devoted to decorating the mirror and manipulating public opinion. Living in proximity to Essau we would have a hard time finding the fault line of his tragic flaw. Ultimately, though we can all observe the utter hollowness of his character. As devoted as he was to his father, supposedly, it was more about his own selfish agenda than anyone could presume. His entire campaign produced a world of sizzle but delivers a paucity of steak.

Whenever a statement in Pirke' Avos is introduced with the words, "He used to say"-"Hu Haya Omer" there is one approach that explains it to mean that he said it frequently and repeatedly. It was not a one time statement, a quotable moment. Another explanation can be gleaned from the opposite of the following example: A young doctor gave an amazing presentation about the dangers associated with cigarette smoke and everyone left the auditorium inspired, informed, and impressed. The very next day that same doctor was spotted in the street dragging shameless on a cigarette. He was approached with shock and dismay by one of the attendees of his lecture. He responded in a cavalier fashion, "What do you want from me? How is the value of my lecture diminished by my

behavior?" Whenever the Mishne says, "Hu Haya Omer-He used to say" it may be read more literally "he was what he said"!

Sure it was good for Essau to marry from a better family, but it was purely symbolic behavior void of substance. Mitzvos are not fig leaves to cover up violations. If one steals and gives a token donation, does that sanitize the bad behavior? Essau used Mitzvos to sway opinions as if "perception is reality" is his sole guide to morality.

The verse testifies that he saw clearly what his father really wanted him to do. He knew what was necessary to gain his father's graces just like Jacob but he opted out on his own because it would interfere with his life- style. Then, rather than taking responsibility for his own poor choices he dedicates his life to persecuting his brother when it was he that conveniently chose that red- red soup again and again rather than... Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.