

# A THOUSAND LIFE LESSONS

by Rabbi Label Lam

*And he (Essau) said, "Is he not rightly called Yaakov? Since he has gone behind me these two times, he took my birthright and see now he took away my blessing..." (Breishis 27:36)*

This is a lightning bolt from the deep past. Essau for the first time betrays his woefully mistaken impression of the sale of the birthright that had had occurred fifty years earlier. Sure Yaakov under executive orders from his mother had just usurped his blessing. Rivka had observed his lack of readiness for those blessings. She held the long kept secret of the potentially negative prenatal prophecy that Essau may not turn out right. Why had his character stagnated and even worsened over the next five decades? Who was to blame for that? Let us appreciate the relevance of that false accusation he launched at his brother in his hour of crisis.

The verse openly testifies that after the sale of the birthright Yaakov had given him not only the beans he so desperately requested but bread and apparently some drink too because it is written, "And he ate and he drank and he got up and he left and he despised the birthright!" (Breishis 25:34) If it is true that Yakkov had taken advantage of him in a vulnerable state and not that he was tricked into forfeiting the birthright then he should have protested then and there when his stomach was full. Why should he leave the scene of the crime silently? That proved how little he valued the birthright. Now we find out that for fifty years Essau is telling himself the story that he was a victim of deception. For fifty years he tricked himself. Playing the victim keeps one from getting past their tragic flaws. If one blames others then he is not responsible. Others are! This may be fine for spinning perceptions in a political universe but for personal growth it's a crippling mentality.

Someone asked me if there was some diplomatic or delicate way that he could ask the young woman he had been dating, who was a divorcee, about her first marriage. It occurred to me that rather than ask, "What went wrong?" which is an invitation for a flood of negativity, he should rather ask, "What did you learn from your first marriage?" If all she can say is that her husband was a no good such and such, then history may likely be readying to repeat itself. It's hard to imagine that anyone going through such a trauma didn't glean some personal life lessons.

In super contradistinction to Essau's blame game let us bathe in the light of someone who took a completely different approach. One of my good friends was shocked and terribly dismayed when he heard of his older brother Avrumi's horrific car accident in Israel three years ago. Avrumi was driving someone to the airport in his minivan when a driver in the on coming direction decided to pass a truck. He glanced off of a police car, spun out of control and struck Avrumi's van. Boruch HASHEM

Avrumi survived but tragically he lost both of his legs. Months after the accident Avrumi, was allowed to leave the hospital temporarily and arrangements were made for him and his family to go to a hotel for Pesach. Once there, he phoned the fellow whose driving indiscretion had caused the whole episode. He told him that he would like to meet him and that he shouldn't be nervous about it because he had no malice against him.

Remarkably he showed up. There standing before him was a man with a yarmulke and sporting a beard. Avrumi had expected to see a secular Israeli. The young fellow told him that because of all the problems the accident has caused he started to think a great deal and that eventually caused him to become a Baal Teshuva! He told that young man, "It's worth it that I lost my legs so that you should become an observant Jew."

I was with Avrumi this past Motzei Shabbos and I was amazed to meet a person who would have reason to play the blame game, as Essau did, and stay stuck in the past but rather chose to embrace reality and to learn a thousand life lessons. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).