

BIRTHRIGHT BATTLES & MATERIAL WORLDS

by Jon Erlbaum

- This Week's **RRR** (Relevant Religious Reference): "**Pour into me, now, some of that RED RED**" - Esau's way of asking for some lentils, in *GENESIS, 25:30*
- This Week's **SSC's** (Suitable Secular Citations): o **SSC 1: "We are spirits in a material world"** - *STING/The Police, from "Spirits in a Material World"* o **SSC 2: "We are living in a material world, and I am a material girl"** - *MADONNA, from "Material Girl"* (perhaps prior to her newfound name & worldview)

STING VS MADONNA

It's the battle of the uni-named mega-stars: Sting vs. Madonna. Both have sung out about the "material world", yet with different spins that parallel the "Battle for the Birthright" between Jacob & Esau! Our Forefather Jacob - readily recognizing that "we are SPIRITS in a material world" (see Sting's SSC above) - models for humankind the discipline of seeking beneath the surface. Esau, on the other hand, demonstrates the desire to focus on the surface itself. Acknowledging that we live "in a material world", he is therefore quite content to view himself as a "material guy" (see Madonna's SSC above).

RED RED

...The instant-gratification seeking Esau begins to expose his superficial worldview when he sells his Birthright for a bowl of lentils, barely giving it a second thought. After returning from the Hunt, Esau is consumed by his desire for food, to the point where he tells his Brother Jacob, "*Pour into me, now, some of that RED RED*". "Red red" what? "*Red Red Wine*"? [Sorry for the gratuitous 60's era song reference][1].

What happened to the **noun "lentil"**? By describing the object of his desire through fixation on its color - i.e. by referring to his food as a **double adjective** - Esau is beginning to reveal his true "colors". Here is where Hebrew comes in handy in exploring the heart of a matter. **Tellingly, in Hebrew, the word for "NOUN" conveys INTERNAL "ESSENCE", while the word for "ADJECTIVE" conveys EXTERNAL "DESCRIPTION"** [2]. The life choices of Esau, exemplified by the sale of his Birthright, illustrate that if our physical desires lead us to fixate on superficial appearances and

descriptions - if we repeatedly exchange a world of nouns for a world of adjectives - we too may end up trading in our Birthrights for short-lived satisfactions! [3]

THE "JEWISH AMERICAN" & THE "AMERICAN JEW"

Perhaps Esau's outlook can shed some light on an age-old question that each of us would do well to continue asking: do I consider myself to be a Jewish American or an American Jew? [For those of you that live in another Country, simply replace "American" with the appropriate term]. While this question may seem to be a mere exercise in semantics, the answer may have implications that are far grander than grammar.

The Thanksgiving season, which beckons us to focus on and appreciate the many wonderful virtues of life in America, is a particularly fitting time to ponder this question. With all of the complaints people have about the U.S., which is certainly not perfect, America's citizens - Jews and non-Jews alike - have a tremendous amount to be thankful for in this Country. Which only brings us right back to our question: Jewish American (WITH "AMERICAN" AS THE NOUN) or American Jew (WITH "JEW" AS THE NOUN)? Now that we know that a noun reveals the essence - and that an adjective only describes a more superficial, external reality - to which label should we award the prestigious position of the noun? To the American in us or the Jew in us? Perhaps it would be helpful to consider the following suggestion before formulating an answer: that **however we perceive our ESSENTIAL identity will most likely determine the legacy that we succeed in passing on.**

"ORTHODOX", "CONSERVATIVE", ETC. - MORE REASONS TO BEWARE OF ADJECTIVES

There is another familiar case in which adjectives may cause more confusion than clarification: the misleading labels of "Orthodox", "Conservative", "Reform", "Reconstructionist", "Unaffiliated", "Ashkenazic", "Sephardic", etc. It's important to ask whether or not these words have anything to do with who we are in our kishkas (insides)! If we were able to perform a Litmus Test on our souls - or perhaps a "Litmus Configuration" on our souls, for "Midnight Run" fans who are more familiar with the Grodin/DeNiro technique for counterfeit money inspection[4] - would we actually expect to find any trace of these labels? *Do we really think that just as there are various blood types, a litmus test would reveal various "soul types", such as AJ (Ashkenazic Jew), OJ (Orthodox Jew), UJ (Unaffiliated Jew), etc.? Do these labels somehow exist as "spiritual-chemical" elements on some kind of "Spiriodic Table"?*

It's crucial to keep in mind that the essential soul of a Jew has no such adjectives! A Jew is a Jew is a Jew. And the more we learn to focus on our shared essence, the more we can appreciate the splendor of our true unity! May G-d grant us the wisdom to continually discern the differences between external adjectives and essential nouns!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos! Love, Jon & The Chevra

1. "Red Red Wine" is a song originally written and recorded by Neil Diamond, and it was then covered by

UB40 and others.

2. In Hebrew, a noun is called a *shem etzem* ("name of essence"), while an adjective is called a *shem toar* ("name of description")
3. Some of the ideas in this "Red Red" section are adapted from the insights of Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, as found in an Etz Chaim e-newsletter
4. From the movie "Midnight Run"

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