

ESAV! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN SO FAST?

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And he ate, and he drank, and he arose and he left; and Esav denigrated the right of the first-born." [25:34]

As we noted last year, the Medrash explains that the right of the first-born meant the right to lead in the service of G-d. Before the children of Aaron and the entire tribe of Levi were designated, the service was led by the first-born. This is what Esav sold away.

The Avnei Azel describes the "path of Esav" from this incident. Esav demonstrates that he doesn't value holy and spiritual matters - he sells them short. He is far more interested in eating and drinking and satisfying his every physical desire. Yaakov isn't so preoccupied with the physical, nor is he interested in honor, so he goes after the right to lead the service only because his efforts and work are towards spiritual matters, and he sees that these will be neglected by Esav. But when Yaakov goes to claim the mantle, it is then that Esav gets angry and starts screaming that Yaakov has tricked him - "twice he has held me back!"

Asks the Avnei Azel, "Esav! have you forgotten so fast?" Esav himself tossed off and denigrated the leadership as a result of his own spiritual laziness and physical desires, and Yaakov acquired it through his own hard work and effort, and by giving up the pleasures of food and drink which overcame Esav. This was no trickery.

How do we measure by this standard? Do we recognize our need for spiritual guidance from those who have spent their lives in Jewish studies... or do we try to assume the mantle ourselves? As Pirkei Avos, the Sayings of the Fathers, teaches us, everyone must find a Rabbi, a teacher. To be anything less than a leading scholar, and claim nonetheless to be able to lead (even to lead ourselves!) - this is characteristic of Esav.

Even as a Jewish community, we must be careful to focus upon our true spiritual priorities, rather than attempting to redefine Jewish life on our terms. The mantle of leadership must be given to **spiritual** leaders.

In our day, we have a host of social clubs and activist groups within the Jewish community. All of them have their place and their purpose. When they work as part of Jewish life, they are a great asset - but when they claim to be the heart of the Jewish people, when they claim to offer a path to

Jewish continuity, they are very much mistaken. And it's not merely wrong, it's dangerous.

What message do we project when a dance club is called a "Jewish continuity program?" What do we say to children if we place remembrance of the Holocaust as our "highest Jewish priority?" Are we instilling Jewish pride? Or is this grabbing the mantle from true spiritual leadership, like Esav trying to take over from Yaakov? True Jewish spirituality isn't part of our Jewish future; it **is** our Jewish future.