

Who Is Esau?

By: Yosef Vogel

One of the most intriguing stories most of us heard as children, is the sibling rivalry between Jacob and Esau. It is a story that forms one of the great Jewish paradigms of our lives as a people. It is also a story that remains ambiguous as to the personalities of the main characters and the legacy they leave over to their descendents.

The simple and great question that has puzzled commentators for centuries is that if Esau is evil why does our patriarch Isaac love him? How, with a father like Isaac and a grandfather like Abraham, does one end up with an "Esau"? Why as the story unfolds do both parties at particular junctions seek reconciliation?

We all spend most of our time and energy in various professions and occupations trying making a living. There are many types of people that inhabit these roles; however they could all be divided into two general categories.

There are those on the one hand who are seeking a more secure occupation or profession where the exposure to risk is limited. On the other hand there is the entrepreneur who not only is more risk inclined but seeks to transform all challenges they face into opportunities which will be directed to their advantage. A person can seek to invest in a blue chip property where the risk is low but with only a limited yield. Or one can choose to transform a vacant site into something which ultimately can produce a far greater return than his original investment.

So too in our spiritual and religious lives is there the tendency to move in these two very different directions. There are those on the one hand, who seek to play it safe and not expose themselves or their children to anything that is hostile or foreign to their innate values and traditions for fear of the risk of being influenced. On the other hand there are those with greater courage, strength and sense of purpose who are willing to interact with outside negative influences with a view of trying to transform them into powerful positive force.

It is these two types of personalities that characterise Jacob and Esau, which are inherent inside each and every one of us. Our mission in life as Jews is not only to strive for a secure and limited return on our investment in life but to learn how to both embrace and manage risk. The ultimate goal is reached when we can create reconciliation between these two tendencies in our own lives, which in the macro world will bring reconciliation between Jacob and Esau.

25 November

Toldot

Shabbat Begins: 3:45 pm

Shabbat Ends: 4:51 pm