

A-39

"TWO PERSONALITIES: a study in contrasts"

Two important people are introduced to us in this morning's Bible Reading, two people who were destined to become the ancestors of two great nations, whose histories were to be intertwined as a result of conflicts and struggles. The biographies of these two people fill a good part of the Bible's narrative; and the histories of these two nations is the stuff of which Jewish history - and, in fact, world history - is made. The stories of these two is something which can be found in the Bible and in the history-books. What we must attempt, within the limits of a sermon, is to study not their histories, but their personalities. For only by studying their contrasting personalities can we gain an insight into the nature and psychologies of these people. Once we understand the basic differences of personality of these two men - namely, Jacob and Esau - we can hope to understand the reasons and drives and motives which molded their lives and the lives of their children after them even until this day.

Furthermore, it will be profitable to each of us personally to understand these differences. For the personalities of Jacob and Esau are not things of the past - they are universal types which we recognize about us in everyday life.

Jacob and Esau were born twins; as it were, very opposite sides of one coin. Let us trace their development in three fields - their birth, their professions and their intellectual attitudes.

1. Their Birth.a) Esau:

1. He is in a hurry to be born, and comes before Jacob.
2. He is "admoni" - red-headed. Our Rabbis thought the color significant, and they said: "siman la'zeh she'hou shofech damim", it is a sign that he will be a murderer, a spiller of blood. That is, hot-headed, temperamental, seething.
3. Unlike other infants, Esau is "koulo adress sei'ar", all covered with hair. He was prematurely developed, as if he had no patience with the normal process of physical growth, and he was already hairy at birth. Our Rabbis even saw a hint to this in his name, when they related "esav" to "asuy", that "asuy ve'nigmar k'ben shanim", he was "made and completed like an older man". Esau could not understand growth and gradual progress. He could visualize only the finished product.

The picture of Esau is therefore given in his earliest youth - impatient, impetuous, in a hurry, one who cannot wait to achieve his goal.

b) Jacob:

1. He is in no rush - "ve'achrei chen yatsa achiv", he allows Esau to make his way in a hurry and to capture the "bechorah", the rights of the first-born. But he does not despair, for he plans for a better time, later, when he will be able to acquire the "bechorah" legitimately.
2. Jacob was not the hairy boy that Esau was, He probably was a weakling, pale and wan, helpless and thin.
3. While Esau rams ahead, Jacob begins as only second-best. "Ve'yado ochezes ba'akev ~~weak~~ achiv", Jacob's hand grasps Esau's heel.
 - a. "ekev", the heel, symbolizes Esau. It stands for swiftness, speed, racing - we speak of Achilles' heel, and picture speed as a winged heel - which is impersonal, will step on anyone to get where it wants to go.
 - b. "yad", the hand, symbolizes Jacob. It is the hand which slowly gropes forward, making its way not too quickly, but steadily and surely, hurting no one, and, on the contrary, lending a helping hand.

2. Their Professions.a) Esau:

He is an "ish yodea tsayid", a hunter, one who makes a living by a fast kill.

He is too impatient to grow vegetables or raise farm animals; he prefers to be impulsive, to kill his prey and get his food ready-made and on the spot. The Esau of the twentieth century business world is an all too well known type: he is the economic hunter, the speculator and big-time gambler, who is out to make a fortune in a day, and if he cannot achieve "boom" he would rather "bust". The stock market is his home, and his economic philosophy is "make or break" - within a day. He is the hunter, insensitive to the feelings of others and in a hurry to kill

b) Jacob:

He was an "ish tam, yoshev ohalim". According to Ibn Ezra, "ohalim" refers to the tent where the peasant would sit while tending to his cattle. "Ro'eh mikneh be'oholei ha'mikneh, she'hayah chafetz Yaakov le'hisasek, ke'avraham ve'yitzchak avosav, be'mireh tsoan u'vakar". No hunter he; rather, the shepherd who tends to the patient and demanding work of raising sheep or cattle, caring for them and nursing them slowly; the work of constructive growth, not destructive slaughter is his way of making a living. A Jacob in the modern business world is not the bragging, insensitive speculator, the economic hunter and robber-baron, but the patient businessman who is hard-working and honest, nurturing a small business from its infancy with tenderness and devotion, putting his personality into his work. He knows that the Esau-type is doomed to failure, that the get-rich-quick fellow usually dies slowly - of poverty, and that the patient and honorable worker gradually accumulated enough wealth to live respectably and comfortably. While he is "yoshev ohalim", in the store or office or factory, he remains an "ish tam", honest, devoted and patient.

3. Their Education.

a) Esau: Isaac recognized one quality of Esau's: "ki tsayid be'fiv", he had his prey in his mouth. An ancient collection of Yemenite Midrashim, still in manuscript form, interprets this verse literally - Esau is a hunter with his mouth. He has no doubts and has an answer for everything. "tamid muchan la'anos bi'dvarim". He manages to get a mail-order education and a degree from a diploma mill, because he hasn't the patience for normal growth and development, he must get the finished product immediately. His knowledge of books and classics comes from "digests". He has all the answers, and he got them in a hurry. But he is not a "wise man", he remains only a "wise guy", for fundamentally he is an ignoramus.

b) Jacob: "Ish tam yoshev ohalim", Rabbis say "Ohalim" refers to schools: "yotsei mi'beis midrasho shel Shem le'beis midrasho shel Ever, u'me'ever le'beis midrasho shel avraham". His education is not all at once, "al regel achass", but slow and steady and sure and thorough. He does not skip any classes, only promoted. His world outlook is not revolutionary, but evolutionary.

The highest point of Jacob's career is when he has the vision of G-d at Bethel. At that time he sees an object which symbolizes all that we have been trying to say about the personality of Jacob. He sees "sulam nutzav artsah ve'roshe magia shamaimah". The ladder is symbolic of his belief in growth and progress, his knowledge that man cannot jump from earth into heaven - he must patiently climb there, rung by rung.

And how these two personalities reappear in our own day. The Jacob - and Esau- types are all about us. The recent suicide of a the young, brilliant Jew who was chief legal authority for the UN brings into focus all the criticism leveled at the UN by some Americans. No doubt many of these criticisms are earnest and sincere. But they mainly come from an Esau outlook. They forget the youth of the UN; they fail to realize that it takes time for growth and advancement; that it is not normal for a UN to be born "asuy ve'nigmar k'ben shanim".

Or take those many visitors to Israel. Most come back with good, optimistic reports. Like Jacob, they realize that perfection takes a long time and a lot of patience. They have the maturity to overlook minor inconveniences. But some there are who return with an Esau-like attitude: "Customs was inefficient", "The Taxi-driver in Deganyah was impolite" etc. They expect a finished product, "koulo aderes sei'ar". They forget that a nation must climb

to greatness and efficiency and perfection rung by rung. You can declare a State to exist but you cannot make it perfect by simply declaring it so. So, also, the attitudes of many of our fellow-Jews to Judaism and especially Jewish Law. There is no doubt that conditions change and some sort of change should therefore take place in our Laws. But the Jacob-type, patient and understanding and progressive, realizes that Law cannot be tampered with by novices, that Jewish Law does contain provisions - legal ones - for its own change. It is the Esau-type, impatient, ignorant, intolerant and short-sighted, who constantly demands "change" in Law; who would not dare speak with any authority on civil law or on medicine or on any other specialized field, but who considers himself competent to pass judgement on the problems of Melachah on Shabbos or the principle of Ta'aruvos in Issur Ve'heter. It is a matter of understanding that it is in the nature of things to mature slowly and patiently, not abruptly and senselessly.

In the long run, the impetuous, impatient and brash Esau must burn up his life-energy and dry up, no longer of any good to himself or to the world. Meanwhile, the patient, slow, gradual and careful Jacob, starting from modest and unassuming beginnings, builds up in power and strength, his foundation firm and stable. The spark of life with which the Jacob begins gains in brilliance and intensity until it burns with power and illumination. And then, in the words of a great Prophet in Israel who was himself a descendant of Esau, the prophet Obadiah, "ve'hayah beis yaakov esh, u'veis yossef lehavah, u'veis eisav le'kash"; while the Esaus dry up like dead straw, Jacob will burn like fire, ~~fire~~ the fire of accumulated centuries of patient and tender devotion, and the fire will destroy the straw.

who appreciated the Jacob-characteristics of Israel,
I understood all too well the Esau-personality
of Edom from which he came,

B. meditation

O G-d,

Teach us to emulate Your ways. So that just
as you created the world gradually, so may we
be creative gradually; and teach us, too, to have
as much patience with others as you have
with us. Amen

In actual sermon, did not use any of applic'ns in printed sermon - as UN, Israel
& J. law. Instead, referred to appended letter about atom-bomb spies which I received that
morning. Stormed against it, said that even if the Rosenbergs were radicals vs. U.S. type govt
they could have worked Jacob-wise, evolution, not like Esau - revolution. If cause penalty, they
no was cause. How dare these people, who lived like Esau, now ask for the 27th 17 17 +
plead for them?!

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Further Suggestions for developing
"Two Personalities" sermon

1) picture Elijah, after successful encounter with Jews' King - yet disappointed. He beat them, but they have not yet returned to true way. He still is persevered & must flee from them. He loses confidence in the ability of man to turn, to repent, all he remembers is the carnage. There is no use continuing, better to be dead. Then God puts him on Mt-top, passes before him - representing revolution, violence, speed, suddenness. but then passes before him. Then represents virtues attributed to Jacob in sermon. and then Elijah reappears etc.

2) Story of anti-semitic King who suddenly becomes good & dies at which point - of course it's possible to do it - but rare. And, in fact, it's not natural.