


**CHABAD**  
  
**RESEARCH UNIT**

שבת..... *for Friday nights* ..... קדש

**Friday 28 November 2008 - 1 Kislev 5769**  
**Sedra Toledot**

**ESAU AND HIS WIVES**

**A KEY POINT IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON IS MARRIAGE. THIS APPLIES TO any human being in the world. For the Jewish people, marriage is also central to one's identity as a Jew. In the Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week we read about the first intermarriage, which caused great grief to the parents of the Jewish partner. At the same time, we learn something about the beautifully positive dimension of a wedding.**

Last week's Sedra made clear that Abraham was very concerned that his son Isaac should marry someone from Abraham's own family, and certainly not a Canaanite<sup>1</sup>. We thus see that even at this early stage of development of the Jewish people, there was a definite concern about who one should, or should not, marry.

In this week's Sedra<sup>2</sup> we read about the two sons of Isaac, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was a spiritual person while Esau, by contrast, was a man of violence.

Predictably, it was Esau who married out. The Torah tells us that when he was forty years old he married two women, both from the Canaanite tribe of the Hittites. Esau's non-Abrahamic wives caused "bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebecca"<sup>3</sup>. The Sages comment that



Dedicated by Mrs Tzipora Sufrin ח"י, to the memory and merit of her father k"z ihætk rgcus hfsrn ור װ j "vrv

they persisted in serving idols. It is interesting that Rebecca herself had been born into an idol-worshipping family. Yet as soon as she married Isaac she dedicated herself to service of the One G-d, Creator of Heaven and Earth. By contrast Esau's Hittite wives, although they were in Isaac's home, offered incense to idols. Rashi says the scent of this incense provoked Isaac's blindness<sup>4</sup>.

Later in the Sedra, Rebecca tells her husband Isaac about how worried she feels that their son Jacob might end up marrying a Hittite girl, like Esau<sup>5</sup>. There were no other young women in the vicinity. This was one of the reasons why Jacob was sent away from home, north-eastwards, to find a wife from Rebecca's family, as we see in next week's Sedra.

An intriguing point is that one of the Hittite wives of Esau is called Yehudit. It sounds just like a Jewish name and indeed, the Talmud says 'anyone who denies idolatry is called Yehudi'. Rashi explains that really she had a different name, but Esau called her Yehudit in order to pretend to his father that she had truly adopted worship of One G-d<sup>6</sup>.

These events took place over three millennia ago, yet they sound quite familiar in terms of our own time. Yet it is also interesting that Esau married a third wife, who was quite different. She was a daughter of Ishmael, and thus a grand-daughter of Abraham. Her name was Mochlat, which means 'Forgiveness', and Rashi comments<sup>7</sup> that from her we learn that bride and groom are forgiven all their sins on the day of their wedding.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments<sup>8</sup> that the Torah is hinting that Mochlat's own actions reflected this idea. She was indeed a genuinely fine and spiritual person. So why did Esau marry her? On one level, only because he wanted to look good in his father's eyes. On another level, comments the Rebbe, Esau too had a spark of good, which explains why his father Isaac loved him. Eventually, through the course of history, that spark of good in Esau and his descendants will be revealed.

1. See Gen.24:3. 2. Gen.23:19-28:9. 3. Gen.26:35. See also 27:46. 4. Rashi to Gen. 27:1. 5. Gen.27:46. 6. Rashi to Gen.36:2. See Talmud Megila 13a. 7. Rashi to Gen.36:3. 8. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.5 p.163 ff and vol.35 p.118.

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SEDRA TOLEDOT

**LIKE FATHER LIKE DAUGHTER**

Mrs. Gold settled little Aliza down in her playpen, as soon as she entered the house. Her oldest daughter, Becca followed close behind, arms laden with groceries.

“Mom, you can start making supper...I will play with little Aliza, so she’ll be quiet.”

Mrs Gold thanked her daughter, as she hurried to the kitchen, to get everything ready before her husband would return home from work. Twenty minutes later, she emerged from the kitchen with a satisfied grin on her face.

“All done! Becca, thank you for playing with Aliza – how was she?”

“Oh Mom! She was so cute – she was wrinkling up her little nose –she acts just like Daddy does!”

“Who acts like I do?” Mr Gold’s voice rang out as he walked through the door.

“Daddy – I was watching Aliza, and I think she is so similar to you, even though she is only a baby!”

“Interesting Becca...” Mr. Gold put down his briefcase. “What you are saying is connected to this week’s Sedra– Sedra Toledot.”

Becca thought for a minute. “In this week’s Sedra, the first words are that Abraham gave birth to Isaac. And then...”

“Yes,” said her father. “And what happened when Isaac was born?”

“Well,” said Becca, “at eight days old he had Brit Mila, he was circumcised...”

“Great!” Mr. Gold held his hand out. “Now what do you think was a greater deed – that of Abraham, who circumcised himself at 99, or Isaac, who was circumcised at 8 days old?”

Mrs Gold entered the conversation. “Well... Isaac did not really have a choice – he was a baby, who did not understand what was happening to him!”

Mr. Gold nodded. “Exactly! Precisely because it was above Isaac’s understanding is what made it so special. Isaac was following G-d’s command because of his very being, because of his inner soul, not because he thought about it and decided it made sense.”

“But Dad,” said Becca, “Isaac didn’t do anything! It just happened to him!”

“You’re right,” said her father. “When Isaac had Brit Mila it was from the very essence of his soul. And he didn’t even have to do anything, other people did it for him. And we his descendants have inherited the ability to serve G-d from our inner essence as well. But we usually have to do something, it doesn’t just happen....”

Becca jumped off the floor. “I get it! Isaac is one of our forefathers and so we can practice being a Jew the same way he did! So, sometimes, when I do not understand the reason to do a Mitzvah, and I do it anyway – that is the power of Isaac!”

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