



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

2 – 3 December, 2005

2 Kislev, 5766

Parashat Toldot
(Genesis 25:19–28:9)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

We read in this week's Torah portion, *parashat Toldot*, how Esau famously sells his birthright - the legacy of Judaism and the inheritance of moral values from his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham – for a mere pot of lentil stew. Why would he, or anyone one of us, casually or disdainfully opt out of Judaism?

The great 20th century sage Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik sees Esau as desperately tired and hungry.

Esau is a hunter. He is always searching for something. When he finds it, he kills it. He is famished and exhausted not so much from the exertion of his work (hunting), but because he lacks a sustaining faith to give meaning to his life on bleak days. He is weary of the pointlessness of life and the inevitability of death.

Esau's comment that "I am on the point of death, so what use is my birthright to me?" reveals his negative appraisal of the human condition. "Some people, contemplating their mortality, are moved to live their lives thoughtfully, to invest their energies in things that truly matter. Others, like Esau, say 'why need I worry about morality and religion since I will soon die anyway?'" (*Etz Hayim, attributed to Rabbi Yisrael Meyer Kagan*).

Accepting the Jewish birthright by living a serious Jewish lifestyle helps us focus on life. Judaism facilitates an attitude of 'To Life' – *LeChayim!* - instead of a fixation towards death. We affirm life, sanctify it, make living our lives a holy task: "[Torah and Mitzvot] are our life and the length of our days, in them [i.e., Life/Torah/Mitzvot] we are guided day and night" (*the prayerbook*). Judaism insists that life has a point, is meaningful, is of the highest value.

Pick any aspect of living life as an example, and your Jewish birthright will have something positive to say about it: from the food you eat to the clothes you wear; from the love you make to the way you raise your kids and treat your own parents; from your financial ethics to your recycling ethics, to the way you spayed or neutered your pet. How to acknowledge birth and how to mourn death; How to live in Space and how to manage in Time.

Esau disavows his birthright out of despair. May we affirm our Jewish inheritance with joy, with a sense of adventure and appreciation and hope. May we acknowledge, through how we live our lives, the infinite value inherent in our soul's journey on earth and the ultimate importance of living our lives with intention, value, duty, and meaning.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
29 Cheshvan 5766

1st December, 2005