

Toldot 5778

BS"D Parashat Toldot 5778

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

What factors determine personality?

Rivka suffered with her pregnancy and went to obtain advice at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. There she was told that in her womb were twins who would become the forefathers of two nations who would change the course of history, and that the younger would surpass the older.

Why did Rivka go to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, which according to some was situated in the northern city of Tzfat, while Rivka was living in Hevron; she could have taken advice from the greatest spiritual figure of her generation, her husband Yitzchak?

And altogether, how could Rivka act to divert the blessings to Ya'akov against her husband's wishes?

I suggest that Rivka could not in any way confide in her husband with this matter, as follows:

Rivka knew that she was carrying twins. The Midrash says that when she passed a yeshiva, one fetus would become aroused, and when she passed an idolatrous temple, the second fetus would become aroused.

She knew that one of them constituted a bad seed from the moment of conception, so that nothing could change his basic nature.

Yitzchak was not aware of the terrible suffering of his wife,

who knew she was going to give birth to an evildoer who craved idolatry. Rivka concluded that her innately evil son was her fault, as Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister, and the righteous son could be credited to Avraham's son Yitzchak.

When the twins grew up, Rivka could not tell Yitzchak about Esav's evil deeds and just how far he had gone in his wickedness, lest Yitzchak blame her for having brought that evil soul from the house of Betuel and Lavan. Rivka's regular practice was therefore to praise Esav before Yitzchak.

Matters continued in that fashion until their bar mitzvah age. Ya'akov became a righteous man who sat in study, whereas Esav was a man of the field, a man of absolute licentiousness.

Rebecca heard that Yitzchak was about to bless "righteous" Esav thanks to her own words of praise over the years, and she understood that she had to correct the warped situation that she, herself had created by hiding the truth from her husband.

Rivka succeeded in hiding her great secret until Yitzhak understood by himself that Esav was evil when he married Canaanite women.

Many lessons that can be learned from Rivka's conduct; but perhaps the most important one is do not tamper, pervert or conceal the truth.

More on Rivka's Great Secret

Educators and psychologists struggle over the question: What is the major factor that fashions the human personality – heredity or environment? A person is composed of traits he inherits from his parents, but he is also influenced by his surroundings. Which of the two is decisive?

The question becomes incisive when we talk about twins who are

polar opposites in their personalities.

Heredity and environment indeed, constitute primary components in fashioning the personality, but it appears that the decisive factor is the divine soul that HaShem breathes into one.

Like an artist who creates using various media: paper, cloth, parchment, canvas and glass. Oil paint will ruin paper and chalk will leave no imprint on glass. Likewise, an educational approach that stresses character improvement will be lost on someone totally selfish, just as the free spirit may be repelled by an approach that emphasizes strictures.

Yitzchak and Rivka strove to influence Esav to be true to Torah, but the call of the field was decisive. All of his parents' words of Torah and chastisement were rejected in the face of his desire to lead a life of licentiousness and immediate gratification. Esav, thus remained Esav.

Rivka knew full well who Esav was, and Esav knew himself, as well. Esav's twin, Ya'akov, knew very well who his descendants would have to deal with until the end of time.

When Rivka learned of Yitzchak's intent to transmit the blessings to Esav, she was left with no choice but to prevent this occurring at any cost. She found herself in a situation that she herself had created by hiding the true nature of Esav from Yitzchak – the reality that Esav had a soul that detested holiness.

Rivka told Ya'akov, "Let any curse be on me, my son" (Bereishiet 27:13). I take upon myself the consequences liable to be caused by your deed, because I am responsible for the situation created.

Esav's son was Eliphaz, who bore a son named Amalek. The Midrash states (Sifri on Bereishiet 33:4), "There is a well-known rule that Esav hates Ya'akov." That hatred did not

derive from anything Ya'akov did or said. Rather, Esav's soul was the total opposite of Ya'akov's, just as impurity is the opposite of purity.

The Talmud in Pesachim 118b relates that in the future the nations will bring a gift to the Messiah, and HaShem will reject Esav's gift.

Nowadays, who are Esav's descendants?

According to tradition, most of the population of Christian Europe is linked to Esav, including those who emigrated from Europe to other places like the Western Hemisphere. It is interesting to note that the flags of most of the countries of Europe, including the United States, include the color red which is associated with Esav.

Shabbat Shalom,

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