

Toldot 5780

BS"D Parashat Toldot 5780

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Rivka's Great Secret

Rivka suffered during her pregnancy and went to obtain advice at the yeshivah of Shem and his son Ever. There she was told that, in her womb, she was carrying twins who would become the forefathers of two nations and two opposing cultures. These twins would change the course of history, and the younger would surpass the older.

Why didn't Rivka seek advice from the greatest spiritual figure of her generation, her husband Yitzchak? And why did she act to divert her husband's blessings?

I suggest: Even without being told, Rivka knew that she was carrying twins, for when she passed a yeshivah, 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.

Rivka concluded that her innately evil son was her fault. After all she was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister. She also concluded that the righteous son could be credited to her husband, who was Avraham's son.

When the twins grew up, Rivka could not tell her husband about Esav's evil deeds and just how far he had gone in his wickedness, lest he 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 the twins reached Bar Mitzvah age. Yaakov became a righteous man devoted to his studies, whereas Esav became a man of the field engaged in absolute licentiousness.

Rivka heard that Yitzchak was about to bless Esav, thanks to her own words of praise over the years. She understood that she had to correct the warped situation that she herself had created by hiding the truth from her husband. So, she did so to the best of her ability.

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

MORE ON RIVKA'S GREAT SECRET

Psychologists debate what is the major factor that fashions the human personality – heredity or environment. We are all composed of traits we inherited from our parents, but to what degree are we influenced by our surroundings? Which of the two is decisive? The question becomes more perplexing when dealing with twins who possess personalities that are polar opposites.

Heredity and environment, indeed, constitute primary components in fashioning the personality. However, it appears that the decisive factor is the divine soul that HaShem breathes into every human being at birth.

The end result can be compared to an artist who paints by using various media: paper, cloth, parchment, canvas and glass. Oil paint will ruin paper, while chalk will leave no imprint on glass. Likewise, an educational approach that stresses character improvement will be lost on someone inherently selfish, just as the free spirit may be repelled by an approach that emphasizes constraints.

Yitzchak and Rivka strove to influence Esav to be true to Torah values, but the call of the wild was too strong. All of his parents' holy words of 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, Yaakov, also knew very well who his descendants would have to deal with until the end of time.

When Rivka learned of Yitzchak's intent to bless Esav, she was left with no choice but to prevent this at any cost. She found herself in a situation that she herself had created by hiding from Yitzchak the true nature of Esav – that Esav had a soul that detested holiness. So, Rivka accepted all the consequences of her act and told Yaakov (Bereishiet 27:13):

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"Let any curse be on me, my son."

Rivka acted as she did because she knew that Esav was born with the soul of a pagan. Indeed, Esav became the father of Eliphaz, whose son was Amalek. And this is why the Midrash states (Sifrei on Bereishiet 33:4): "There is a well-known rule that Esav hates Yaakov."

That hatred did not derive from anything Yaakov did or said. Rather, Esav's soul was the total opposite of Yaakov's, just as impurity is the opposite of purity.

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 United States. It is interesting to note that the flags of almost all of the

countries of Europe, including the United States, include the color red which is associated with Esav due to his red hair and blood-thirsty nature.

Shabbat Shalom,

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