

Toldot 5781

BS"D Parashat Toldot 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Rivkah's Secret

Rivka suffered with her pregnancy and went to obtain advice at the yeshiva of Shem and his son Ever. There she was told that in her womb were twins who would become the forefathers of two opposing nations; two antithetical, contradictory cultures which were destined to navigate the course of history; and that the younger would surpass the older.

Question: Why did Rivka not turn to the greatest spiritual figure of her generation, her husband Yitzchak? And furthermore, how could Rivka act to divert the blessings to Ya'akov against her husband's wishes?

I suggest that Rivka was aware of the innate nature of each of the twins she was carrying. 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 an evil seed from the moment of conception, so that nothing could change its basic nature. However, Yitzchak was unaware of the terrible suffering of his wife, who knew she was going to give birth to an evildoer who craved idolatry. Rivka assumed that as Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister, her innately evil son came through her, while the righteous son was from Yitzchak, Avraham's son. As the twins were growing 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. Ya'akov became a righteous man who sat in study, whereas Esav was a man of the field and of absolute licentiousness. Rivka heard that Yitzchak was about to bless "righteous" 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.

Esav hates Ya'akov

Educators and psychologists struggle over which is the dominant factor that fashions the human personality – heredity or environment. A person is comprised of traits he inherits from his parents, but he is also influenced by his surroundings. Which of the two is decisive? The question becomes more complex when dealing with twins who are polar opposites in their personalities. Both heredity and environment, indeed, constitute primary components in fashioning one's personality and character. However, it appears that the decisive factor is the divine soul that HaShem breathes into every human being, like an artist who creates by using various media: paper, cloth, parchment, canvas and glass. Oil paint will ruin paper, while chalk will leave no image on glass. Likewise, an educational approach that stresses character improvement will be lost on someone totally egocentric, just as the free spirit will repel an approach that emphasizes constraint. Yitzchak and Rivka strove to influence their sons to be true to the Torah, but the call of the field was decisive for Esav. All his parents' words of

Torah were rejected in the face of Esav's 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 intention to transmit his blessings to 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 – the reality that Esav had a soul that detested holiness.

Ya'akov voiced his concern regarding his mother's plan, but Rivka told Ya'akov (Bereishiet 27,13):

וְעַתָּה אֵלֵךְ וְעִסְתָּ בְּרֵגְלֶיךָ וְעָלִיתָ אֶל אֲבִיךָ וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה

“Let any curse be on me, my son”

In other words, I take upon myself the consequences liable to be caused by your deed, because I am responsible for the situation.

Esav was born with a pagan soul. His son, Eliphaz, bore a son named Amalek, and as the Midrash states (Rashi in Bereishiet 33:4 cites Sifrei):

וְעַתָּה אֵלֵךְ וְעִסְתָּ בְּרֵגְלֶיךָ וְעָלִיתָ אֶל אֲבִיךָ וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה וְשָׂאתָ בְּרֵיכָה

It 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 and negation 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 United States. It is interesting to note that the flags of most of the countries of Europe, including the United States, contain the color red, which is associated with Esav.

Several lessons can be learned from the parasha:

The realities of our lives are often painful, but we have no choice but to face them with trust and reliance on our Creator. Rivka had to choose between divulging her secret to Yitzchak of an evil son, possibly compromising his devotion to her, or to spare Yitzchak of the reality by concealing the true nature of Esav which came to haunt her 13 years later.

1- In our private and public lives, any divergence from the truth will at some point return to challenge us.

2- There are genuinely evil people in the world with whom the Jewish people should not even try to enter into a discourse: neo-Nazis, Islamic fundamentalists, the leaders of Iran, Hamas, the PLO and many others, because

אברהם אבינו לא ידע שיש אדם רשע בשם עשׂו

There is a well-known rule (halacha) that Esav hates Ya'akov

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5781/2020 Nachman Kahana