

WHERE DID THIS CHILD COME FROM?

by Rabbi Berel Wein

There are many difficult underlying questions posed in the Torah reading of Toldot. But the most difficult question of all, the one that nags at the soul of all Jewish parents from the days of Yitzchak and Rivka onwards, is how does such a holy union of marriage and family produce a child like Eisav. Avraham had a son, Yishmael, who proved to be far different than his father, a violent and capricious person. But Yishmael was not a son of Sarah, but rather of Hagar, and thus his departure from the way of life of his father Avraham is somewhat understandable. And even more, Yishmael, in his older years, actually repents and reforms and returns to the way of life of Avraham and Yitzchak, and acknowledges Yitzchak's primacy in the task of carrying forward the spiritual legacy of Avraham. But Eisav, who is a twin of Yakov, and not only has Yitzchak as father but Rivka as a mother, grows up to be a womanizer, a murderer, a man of the sword. And he never repents of those traits and behavior patterns! So, where does the answer to this disturbing parental and generational problem lie?

The great commentators to the Torah all wrestle with this difficulty and each, according to his tradition, insight, and genius, volunteers an answer to the problem. The answer that strikes me as most relevant to our generation and our present circumstances of education and child-raising is the one advanced by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his monumental commentary to the Torah. Rabbi Hirsch boldly observes that Yitzchak and Rivka are to be faulted for giving Eisav the same type of education and curriculum of study that they assigned to Yakov. Eisav is not Yakov. That was obvious from the moment they left Rivka's womb. The Torah itself describes them as being radically different personalities with widely differing interests and talents. "And Eisav was a person of the fields, one who knew how to hunt, while Yakov was an innocent person, a dweller in tents of study." The diligent student, the bookish scholar, should receive one type of training that befits him and his outlook and his scholarly abilities, while the athletic, physically strong and committed hunter should receive another type of education. Both forms of education, that of Eisav and of Yakov, should be in the tradition of Torah and both forms of education should have the same goal of producing a moral and Torah-observant person. But the forms, the methods, the schools, the subjects taught and the manner in which they are taught, of each form of education will certainly differ one from another. By forcing Eisav to follow Yakov's educational track exactly, Yitzchak and Rivka promoted, albeit unwittingly and certainly unintentionally, Eisav's defection from their tradition and way of life.

Parents have the duty to give their children a proper Torah education. But not every child should attend the same school or even the same school system that his brother attends. Each child is a world unto himself or herself. Lumping children together and forcing all of them into one

educational stream does a serious disservice to many of those children. Not every child is equipped to sit for long hours every day and study Talmud. By forcing these children into such a one-dimensional framework of education, one almost guarantees that there will be a considerable amount of failures, drop-outs and great disappointments in the families of those children. Parents have to do what is good and right for their children, on an individual basis, and not to do what they think their neighbors, or neighborhood, approve as a proper education. People are terrorized by "the shidduch" and other extraneous pressures. But no child should be sacrificed on the altar of outside considerations when it comes to the choice of the proper school and type of education that fits each of their children. Our streets are unfortunately full of the drop-outs from types of education that were not realistic for them. Rabbi Hirsch's admonition should be a rallying call for all of us in our current complicated and sensitive educational society.

Shabat Shalom.

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