

FAMILY FEUD

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Our father Yitzchak emerges as a very enigmatic person in this week's parsha. The dominant figure in the parsha is our mother Rivkah. It is she who assesses the true situation and character descriptions of her twin sons Eisav and Yaakov. It is she who sends Yaakov to the house of Lavan in order to escape the wrath of his brother Eisav. It is she who orchestrates the plan to obtain the blessings of Yitzchak on behalf of Yaakov instead of Eisav. In short, she is the main player in this drama of eternal confrontation and family tension.

The commentators all ask the same question: "Why is Rivkah so active in all of these momentous family matters while Yitzchak seems so passive in confronting the burgeoning threat of Eisav and his murderous enmity towards Yaakov?" Most commentators seem to think that Yitzchak felt that confronting Eisav would only exacerbate an already bad situation and that Eisav somehow could be won over by being coddled and appeased. Eisav, after all, was the oldest son and in spite of his otherwise evil behavior was respectful of his father. It is reminiscent of the famous book about the Mafia gangsters of New York that was entitled "But They Were Good To Their Mothers."

Other commentators point out that Yitzchak's own experience with his wayward half-brother Yishmael influenced him. After all, at the end of his life Yishmael repented of his ways and reconciled himself to Yitzchak and the holy ways of the house of Avraham. Perhaps Eisav will follow in his ways as well.

Rivkah who comes from the house of Lavan and Betuel is not so sanguine about the future of her eldest son. She recognizes in him the bent toward selfishness, greed and instant gratification that characterizes her brother Lavan. She is of the opinion that making nice to Eisav will not in any way help him overcome his weaknesses. As painful as it must have been for her, she realizes that she must choose between the two brothers. She hears the words of the prophetic message told her during her difficult pregnancy that the two brothers will constantly struggle against each other - that they are polar opposites from her womb onwards.

She is forced to take steps to insure that Yaakov should survive this struggle and emerge reinforced with the blessings of Yitzchak and Avraham intact within him. Yitzchak, who did not hear that heavenly message directly and is therefore not bound by it, hopes to salvage Eisav and does not feel that he will harm Yaakov by so doing.

The Torah records for us the fateful decision of Rivkah to force the matter. After it is over and Yaakov

takes leave of Yitzchak to depart for the house of Lavan, Yitzchak acquiesces in Rivkah's initiative and confirms the blessings to Yaakov.

The tear in the fabric of the family is now complete and stretches all the way through the generations of history. The blessings of Yitzchak to Yaakov have enabled Israel to survive till this day. But the fury and enmity of Eisav over those blessings has never subsided, again even until this day.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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