

START A JEWISH FAMILY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Two of my grandsons have become engaged to be married, all of this occurring over the last ten days. Naturally, this is an occasion of joy and satisfaction to me. It occurs during the period of time that we read this week's parsha which deals with the betrothal and marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka. In the bible and in traditional Jewish life generally, parents have input into the choice of a mate for their children.

Avraham strictly instructs Eliezer not to deign making any marriage arrangement with the daughters of the Canaanites for Yitzchak. Avraham chooses family - his own general family - over all other considerations. There is no doubt that family is a very important consideration in choosing a mate. People who come from stable and loving home environments have a pattern and model to follow in their own later domestic relationships.

Avraham searches for a family that, although it has other defects - paganism and a selfish attitude towards wealth and stretching the truth - at least shares his value of hospitality towards strangers and a sense of compassion towards other human beings. Nevertheless, Rivka represents the exception in her family. She is not a pagan and her sense of hospitality towards others surpasses ordinary standards. She is a product of her family and home but she has gathered within her all of the positive attributes that the family of Avraham possessed while rejecting all of the negative traits and beliefs that the environment of her society impressed upon the rest of the family.

Eliezer is searching for a diamond in the rough. These are very rare. We are told of the "tests" and complications that Eliezer demands and encounters in his search for the proper mate for Yitzchak. He is looking for the benefits that stem from Avraham's family without having the liabilities that usually accompany them. He searches for extraordinary kindness and concern, modesty of behavior and loyalty to family even when that family's beliefs are no longer hers.

It is this remarkable combination of characteristics that mark Rivka as being the special matriarch of Israel that she becomes. When she will look for the proper mate for Yaakov she will also send him back to her family in Aram, in spite of her knowledge of the trickery of her brother Lavan. There too she hopes that he will find diamonds in the rough - women who will build the house of Israel and mother the Jewish people for all eternity.

Yaakov will also have to find the mates that possess all of the positive attributes of the family of Avraham and do not carry with them the burden of the negative traits of the society of Aram. This

effort will cost Yaakov many years of his life, physical privation and mental anguish, but eventually the goal of creating a nation from a few individuals is achieved because of his wives and their characteristics.

Eliezer's search for Rivka becomes the paradigm and model for creating the proper Jewish family and necessary home environment. The search for diamonds is much easier today in the Jewish world than it was for Eliezer. My grandsons may have given their prospective mates diamonds as an engagement gift but I am certain that the women themselves who are involved are the true diamonds in the matter.

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