

YITZCHOK AND RIVKA BUILD A FAMILY

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Death is not only tragic for those intimately affected it also always poses problems of succession and reorganization of the family, company or institution. Avraham and Sarah, the founders of the Jewish nation pass from the scene in this week's parsha. They are succeeded by Yitzchak and Rivka and in fact the majority of the parsha concerns itself with how Yitzchak marries Rivka and they establish their new home together.

In personality, temperament and action Yitzchak and Rivka differ markedly from Avraham and Sarah. Whereas Avraham and Sarah devoted themselves to reaching as many outsiders as they could and were actively engaged in spreading the idea of monotheism in the surrounding society, Yitzchak and Rivka seem to take a more conservative approach. They attempted to consolidate what they accomplished and to build a family nation rather than to try to attract more strangers to their cause.

As we will see in next week's parsha the struggle of Yitzchak and Rivka is an internal family struggle as how to raise Eisav and Yaakov and guarantee the continuity of the ideas and beliefs of Avraham and Sarah through their biological offspring. Eventually it is only through Yaakov that Avraham and Sarah continue and become the blessing that the Lord promised that they would be. The world struggle that engaged Avraham and Sarah becomes a struggle within Avraham and Sarah's family itself.

It becomes abundantly clear that the main struggle of the Jewish people will be to consolidate itself and thus influence the general world by osmosis, so to speak. The time of Avraham and Sarah has passed and new times require different responses to the challenges of being a blessing to all of humankind.

There are those in the Jewish world who are committed to "fixing the world" at the expense of Jewish traditional life and Torah law. Yet the simple truth is that for the Jewish people to be effective in influencing the general society for good there must be a strong and committed Jewish people. King Solomon in Shir Hashirim warns us that "I have watched the vineyards of others but I have neglected guarding my own vineyard."

The attempted destruction and deligitimization of the Jewish people or the State of Israel, God forbid, in order to further fuzzy, do-good, universal humanistic ideas is a self-destructive viewpoint of the purpose of Judaism. Without Jews there is no Judaism and without Judaism there is no true moral conscience left in the world. Therefore it seems evident to me that the primary imperative of

Jews today is to strengthen and support Jewish family life, Jewish Torah education and the state of Israel.

We are in the generations of Yitzchak and Rivka and therefore we have to husband our resources and build ourselves first. We have as yet not made good the population losses of the holocaust seventy years ago! If there will be a strong and numerous Jewish people then the age of Avraham and Sarah will reemerge. The tasks of consolidation of Jewish life as represented by the lives of Yitzchak and Rivka should be the hallmark of our generation as well.

Shabat shalom.

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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