

THE BASIS OF YITZCHAK'S LOVE FOR RIVKA

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Finding the right mate has always been a complicated and potentially hazardous matter. It remains so today. Just ask any parent in our current society who has marriageable age children and you will, in all probability, hear a tale of angst and frustration about the inequities of life and the illogic of it all. In this week's parsha, Avraham faces the task of finding a wife for Yitzchak. His main concern is that the prospective bride be from his extended family and not from the Canaanite women.

Jewish tradition has always viewed the family as being an important component in choosing a proper mate. Though family certainly cannot be the only criterion, it certainly is an important one. The rabbis taught us that the speech and language of a child is always a reflection of the speech and language of the father and mother of that child. People who are raised in serene and loving home environments, homes of tradition and Jewish values usually grow up to be serene, self-confident and proud Jews.

Children who are raised in dysfunctional family environments have great hurdles to overcome to achieve self-worth and a productive life. Both the Canaanites and Avraham's family in Aram were pagans. But Avraham's family had the stability and a minimum code of morality, traits that were lacking in the more permissive and licentious Canaanite society. This was the curse of the Canaanite society and Avraham felt that this factor would be impossible to ever truly overcome.

Eliezer, the loyal servant of Avraham, adds another requirement to the search for the mate of Yitzchak. Innate kindness and goodness and the willingness to sacrifice one's own comforts for the sake of others is part of the makeup of Yitzchak. He was raised in a house where concern for the welfare of others was the everyday norm. A husband and wife have to be on the same page when it comes to this issue.

I recall that in my years as a rabbi there were husbands and wives that would bring to me money to distribute to the needy of the community and caution me not to allow their respective spouse to become aware that they had done so. Sometimes there were halachic or overriding family issues present that even forced me not to accept the donation. But I was always saddened by such situations.

Eliezer's testing of Rivkah was correctly done in order to spare the couple possibly ruinous disputes in their future life together. And since in the house of Avraham and Sarah kindness of spirit and generosity of action and behavior were the fundamental norms of their family life, only a spouse that

also espoused those ideals could bring to Yitzchak happiness and serenity.

The Canaanite society that tolerated and even exalted the societies of Sodom and Amorah could not produce a suitable mate for Yitzchak. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Rivkah. Love is based on character traits and shared values and not only on physical beauty and attraction. That is what makes its achievement so elusive for so many.

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