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Toldos: Lingerin Lessons

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“And Isaac loved Esav because [his] game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob (Bereishis 25:28).”

The commentaries struggle to understand the meaning of this verse. It appears as if the Torah is telling us that Yitzchak and Rivka played favorites. But could this really be? As parents, we learn to appreciate the differences within our children. We celebrate their strengths, help them to address their weaknesses, and create a special and unique bond with each individual child. No two children are alike; each child is a world unto him/herself and it is the sacred task of parents to understand, love and connect with each child. If these lessons are understood and obvious to us (not that we necessarily implement them all the time) they must have known to Yitzchak and Rivka as well. If so, how are we to understand their behavior?

Rashi explains: “What does it mean “*ki tzayid b’fiv*, because his game was in his mouth?” Esav knew how to trap and to deceive his father with his mouth. He would and ask him, “Father, how do we tithe salt and straw?” His father thereby thought that he was scrupulous in his observance of the commandments (Tanchuma, Toeldoth 8).” Esav displayed a false piety and tricked his father, when in fact he was evil and morally bankrupt. Esav hunted his father and trapped him with his words, leading Yitzchak to believe that Esav was genuinely committed to creating and forging a relationship with God.

The Lutzker Rov, Rav Zalman Sorotzin (1881-1966) in his commentary on the Chumash titled, *Oznayim LaTorah* offers further explanation: “Yitzchak was an Olah Temimah, an unblemished offering and he did not see or experience deceit or underhandedness in his familial home. As such when Esav asked him questions about tithing salt and straw, Yitzchak believed these questions to be an expression of Esav’s piety. Rivka however, experienced and witnessed deceitful behavior. She saw the chicanery and trickery of her father and brother; she could discern between genuine piety and a falsified façade.”

Yitzchak Avinu saw the good in others, and in the world for this was the type of home in which he was raised. Avraham and Sarah were people of *chessed*, kindness and selflessness. They saw the good in everyone. Such was the *chinuch* (education) of Yitzchak and so when Esav asked these questions, Yitzchak took them at face value assuming that Esav was really trying. Rivka grew up in a dramatically different environment where lies and deceit were par for the course. Rivka saw through the questions of Esav, she realized they lacked genuine depth – as such she was not convinced of Esav’s piety.

The Torah is not telling us a story of favorites. Yitzchak loved both his sons and Rivka loved both her sons. There are no favorites. Yitzchak loved Esav because he thought he was like Yaakov, Rivka loved Yaakov for his piety but recognizes that her son Esav is not righteous. The lesson to be learned is a twofold one. Firstly, the Torah is teaching us about the impact of our childhood experiences on our adult perceptions. Who we are is often colored by the type of home in which one was raised. Sometimes we have a perspective and outlook which we have gleaned from the home in which we were nurtured. Yitzchak is who he is because of the home of Avraham and Sarah. Rivka is who she is because she grew up in the home of Bisuel and Lavan. This works beautifully if we have received the right kind of familial education. We strive to reinforce these lessons within ourselves and within the families we hope to build. But sometimes, we receive erroneous instruction from our family and upbringing and at times, must unlearn ingrained lessons.

But there is one more lesson. This episode teaches us about the need for proper parenting. Children see, hear, and are impacted by everything which occurs in the home. How parents speak to each other, how they handle stress, what they talk about at the Shabbos table and how they come home from work are all things which leave an indelible impression on our beautiful children. Even when we “*finish*” parenting, our children will be reliving and replaying the events experienced and lessons learned within our homes. Yitzchak keeps the beautiful purity of his parents with him and Rivka can’t get rid of the childhood images of deceit and animosity from her heart and soul. This is the power of the home.