

By Rabbi
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UNDERSTANDING YITZCHOK & RIVKA

Based on the Hashkafa of HaRav Shimon Kessin, SHLIT'A

In memory of Eliyahu ben Yehuda, Dr. Elliot Hahn Z'L

Parashat Toldot is mysterious. The molding of our national identity continues through the next generation, following the petirah of Avrohom and Sarah. The Torah provides over three parshiyot of history regarding our first patriarchal couple. As well as we get to know them, we feel a diminished sense of familiarity with Yitzchok and Rivka. As active a participant as Yitzchok was during the Akeyda, the chapter Torah devotes to that apex event centers around Avrohom. One major ingredient adding to our lack of familiarity is in the relationship between Avrohom and Sarah contrasted by Yitzchok and Rivka. Avrohom and Sarah work as a unified team in the kiruv process and as the founding parents of our people. Whatever differences between them the Torah shares, most dramatically Hagar and Yishmael's expulsion from their home, they end up operating in unison with each other. Rivka and Yitzchok appear to be travelling through life on two separate roads. When their prayers are answered, and Rivka has trouble with the pregnancy, she seeks understanding through the Yeshiva Shaim v'Ever. Yitzchok was a Navi, so why did she not ask him? All of this reaches its pinnacle when it comes time to bequeath the family blessing on the next generation. Rivka and Yitzchok appear to be on totally different tracks that are not reconciled until we see them operating together for the first time at the end of the parasha. Yitzchok and Rivka are unified when they instruct Yaakov to leave home, and even then, the reasoning is expressed with Rivka taking the lead in the agenda. She clearly recognizes that Esav is a threat to Yaakov's life and the future of the Israelite people. In her conversation with her husband, the only reason Rivka provides for wanting Yaakov to leave is so that he does not take a wife from the local population. Yitzchok expresses this in a manner that appears passive. He agrees with Rivka and thereby instructs Yaakov accordingly. How are we to understand their relationship?

Far be it from me to think I can answer this in a manner that clarifies everything stated above. Countless seforim address these points with greater understanding than I possess. That said, I would like to approach this by examining at the most basic level the differences between men and women and apply those differences to Yitzchok and Rivka.

Paradigm man, known as the Zuloso, was not created in the classic sense of the word. How "they" (male and female as one person) came to be is a study in and of itself. At the most understandable

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level, there are two ways we relate to our Creator, Hashem. The highest level is Hashem as "Atzmuso" and is totally beyond human comprehension. Differentiating from Atzmuso is the Ain Sof, and although this aspect of Hashem is equally mysterious and incomprehensible, this is where the Zuloso comes from. We are known as a "Chaylek Eloka M'maal", a living being that was differentiated from the Ain Sof. We are a "chaylek" of the Ain Sof. At the moment of tzimtzum, Divine retraction making "room" for our finite world, the Zuloso came into being. How the Zuloso differentiates is what ultimately defines the difference between man and woman.

The conception of every child begins the same way the differentiation process began in the Zuloso. Male children are a result of an x-y chromosome while females are a product of an x-x chromosome. What many people do not realize is that every embryo begins as an x-based female. If the ovum was fertilized with an x-y sperm cell, it will morph into a male child, while if it was fertilized by an x-x sperm cell, the child will remain and be born as a female. Either way, the embryo begins by developing through the first x chromosome as a female. The chiluk process operated the same way. The first emanation in the chiluk process was woman – connected to the Ain Sof. From the female developed the male united in one form, as one unit. The male represents the finished, independent product that the Zuloso was meant to be, and obviously included is his female counterpart. If Hashem declared that the Zuloso was in a state of "good" on the sixth day, why were they separated? The numerical value of "echod" and "ahava" are both thirteen. As the Zuloso was m'chalek from the Ain Sof, so too was the female separated from the male. Seeking the love of our zivug is a process that culminates in reunifying two entities that were once one and meant to rejoin: Man and woman as well as mankind and Hashem Yisborach. The command to love Hashem Yisborach is based on the reality that reunifying with Him should be as natural as our desire to seek out our zivug. Joining together with Hashem places the Zuloso in a state of homeosta-

sis. (This philosophy is based on the nature of the Zuloso before Adam & Chava ate from the tree of knowledge. Following that sin, love and sexuality underwent a radical transformation.)

The chiluk process provided the female and male parts of the Zuloso with distinct advantages that are still realities in today's world. The female, being the first to differentiate from the Ain Sof, is inherently closer to that aspect of Hashem's Divinity. The practical consequence that is derived from this is that women enjoy "Bina Y'tayra", a heightened sense of understanding. Without, G-d forbid, lowering the Kedusha of this thought, permit me please to compare the role of men and women joining together to the world of electricity. Simply stated, the man represents the plug while the woman represents the electrical outlet, the receptacle. There is a reality that is totally overlooked in this metaphor that defines the uniqueness of both genders. For the male, the light bulb will not illuminate unless the lamp is plugged in and switched on. As for the electrical outlet itself, the receptacle is always charged and electrified, irrespective if anything is connected to it. The inherent nature of woman is to remain connected to the Ain Sof whereas man's nature is to be independent. This may explain why men are commanded to learn Torah and have so many more Mitzvot to observe than women. Men must take the initiative in establishing their connection with the Ain Sof, something that remains inherently natural for a woman. This enabled a prophetess such as Devorah to reach spiritual heights with greater ease and success than her male counterparts. This is why Hashem instructed Avrohom to listen to Sarah during the crisis that resulted in Hagar and Yishmael's departure.

What strengths are inherent is the male part of the Zuloso? Women need less concretized Avoda to reach their level of Yiras Shamayim because of their connection to the Ain Sof. Because of that connection, they are limited in how far they can go. On the other hand, this limitation does not apply to a man. He's outside of the Ain Sof and because of his independ-

ence, man can grow and achieve higher levels of Kedusha. Through Torah, he can achieve greater heights. This makes him into a true Zuloos – an independent entity. Woman experiences the Ain Sof more intimately, but man can achieve greater spiritual heights. Therefore, man is the ultimate destination of the Zuloos. Woman, although complete in and of herself, is a “work in progress” Zuloos moving toward the finished, independent product that becomes man. One cannot become a man without first experiencing womanhood. That was true then and remains true today from the perspectives of biology and personality.

The result of what is expressed above leads to a concept that is well rooted in reality: Men are architects and women are general contractors. Architecture operates in the world of paper-based theory. From one’s mind comes a picture of what a home will look like. General contractors are challenged to transform the theory of architectural design into the reality of a working structure. Both are important as proven by the fact that Hashem created the world the same way. He gazed into the Torah, the architectural design of creation and from there created the world. Both roles are very important and needed to achieve the goal of a new home on what was an empty lot of land! Men can design within the confines of their minds reflecting their independent nature, while women, connected to the Ultimate Designer, the Ain Sof, work more naturally from that vantage point in bringing the theoretical design into defined, concretized reality.

Let’s apply this understanding to Rivka and Yitzchok. Both understood their sons but from different vantage points, different perspectives. (Next week we will focus more clearly on Esav and Yaakov.) One point, though, is clear – they both came into this world as free thinking, good people with inherent strengths that brought with them the potential to change the world for the good. Through Yitzchok’s eyes, Esav’s

potential to do good was fixed in this physically based world. There is much more to the statement that describes Yitzchok’s love for Esav than because he liked his food. Esav knew how to operate in the here and now world of physicality, and with his brother Yaakov, the two of them could have a transformational influence on all of mankind. Yaakov was situated in the tents of heavenly spirituality. His strength was in bringing Ruchniyus into the world of gashmius while Esav could deliver gashmius – mankind and the physical world – to Yaakov in order to sanctify it. Esav’s goal, the challenge of battling the world of gashmius was much greater than Yaakov’s goal of harnessing the powers of Ruchniyus. For thirteen years, both lads stay the roads that are meant for them and work them well. The problem is that with the death of Avrohom, Esav loses it and moves to (excuse the pun), the dark side.

Here is where the uniqueness of Rivka as a woman and a Matriarch and Yitzchok as an Av and Navi come into the picture. By no means is this analysis simple. Why does there appear to be no line of communication between them? The respect Rivka had for her sainted husband was legendary. She knew exactly who he was and felt that if Hashem needed to clarify for Yitzchok who Esav was, Hashem would have told him. Putting aside the spiritual heights Yitzchok achieved, he was still a father who held out hope that his real son, the real Esav would resurface and fulfill his G-d given destiny. Why was Yitzchok able to hold onto this? Because of the tov she’b’Esav, the good he saw in his son, irrespective of how infinitesimal it may have been. Every parent who has a challenging child hangs onto the slightest positive in order to have hope for the future. Rivka sensed the turmoil of her husband, and rather than add to his aggravation by evaluating for him the reality of Esav his father was aware of, she

remained quietly supportive allowing whatever scenario was to be to play itself out.

Finally, the critical time arrives to bequeath to his children the reigns of leadership as they relate to the family heritage. Who would receive the leadership role in being the source of blessing that Hashem promised would continue in Avrohom's family via Yitzchok? Who would be the next Av responsible to maintain Hashem's active identity in this world? Here is where everything reaches a boiling point. Yitzchok is in architectural mode, fully and realistically aware of the potential Esav possesses to be an Av. The problem is that in that moment, he was so far from that mark that by giving him the blessing, Yitzchok could be placing the entire future of the Jewish people in great doubt. Yitzchok is focused on what Esav can become while Rivka is focused on who he is in moment. Here is where Rivka's heightened bina comes to the rescue! She has too much love and respect for Yitzchok to challenge his decision but realizes that something must be done to save the family heritage and more importantly, the family's role as it relates to Hashem Yisborach. By putting Yaakov in the difficult position to appear deceptive, what Rivka creates is a scenario whereby Yitzchok himself can choose which direction the family will move in. If Yitzchok wants, he can take the Brocho away from Yaakov and give it to Esav, or (as he does), leave it with Yaakov and redefine Esav's role in world history. Indeed, the door is left open for Esav to have a relationship with his brother. Whether Esav is an ally to Yaakov (Rav Yehuda HaNasi & Antoninus) or his oppressor (Rome), will be determined not by Esav but by Yaakov. Esav remains an active partici-

pant in how world history unfolds in

the past and will unfold in the future. This is all due to the gifted understanding possessed by Rivka, on a level that truly reflects her connection to the Ain Sof. It was never about Rivka over Yitzchok via Yaakov over Esav. It was about defining the roles of two brothers that considered the reality of the here and now while acknowledging the potential for the challenged brother to rise to the role he was destined for. As much as Yitzchok loved Esav and Rivka loved Yaakov, it is equally clear that Yitzchok loved Yaakov and Rivka loved Esav. Rivka set up the entire scenario but made sure her beloved husband was the one to determine the roles their two sons would play. This was the best of "architecture" and "general contracting" coming together to achieve a result that history has proven correct.

The problem is that very few people within our ranks understand how to interpret history. We learned a few weeks ago how, in the merit of our Avos, Hashem resituated the Middas HaRachamim as an outside influence and placed the Midda within the midst of our people to guarantee that we will always maintain a level that, when the Geulah occurs, renders our nation worthy of transforming Olom HaZeh into Olom HaBah via zichuch. Esav is the agent of the Middas HaRachamim for our people to maintain that level.

With this understanding of the relationship between Yitzchok and Rivka, we are better equipped to understand not just who Yaakov and Esav were, but who they are in the here and now. That's our goal for the next few weeks.