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**A Parsha Weekly by the Friedman Kollel
of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Toldos
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The Other Side of the Story

By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel

We read last week how Eliezer selected a wife for Yitzchak, and it all seemed picture perfect. Avraham instructed Eliezer that he could not choose for him a Canaanite wife, no matter how personally righteous she might be, presumably because the degenerate character traits of her Canaanite heritage would necessarily impact upon her (see Derashos Haran 5). Eliezer complied. He went to Aram to Avraham's family and found Rivka. Rivka demonstrated her benevolence and concern for others, her family recognized that God Himself had ordained her to be Yitzchak's wife (Bereishis 24:50) and upon marrying Yitzchak she proved herself a worthy successor of Sarah (see Bereishis 24:67, with Rashi).

At the start of this week's portion, however, the Torah hints at certain facts that seem to strike a discordant tone. Firstly, the verse reintroduces Rivka as the "daughter of Besuel the Aramean, from Paddan Aram, sister of Lavan the Aramean." As the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 63:4) points out, it is apparently unnecessary to repeat the term Aram three times - certainly if Besuel was an Aramean, his son Lavan was also an Aramean! The Midrash therefore interprets the references to Aram as alluding to the character traits of "ramai," deceitfulness. The verse is teaching that Rivka's father, brother and the people of her locale all had the negative character trait of deceitfulness. Now, while the Midrash teaches that Rivka did not have this degeneracy, the question certainly arises, why was this family preferable to the Canaanites? Why is the degeneracy of deceitfulness more acceptable than the Canaanites' degeneracy?

Secondly, the verse continues that Yitzchak and Rivka were praying to God for children because Rivka was barren. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 63:5) interprets this to mean that she did not possess a womb, and that in order to have children God had to miraculously form a womb for her. This too begs the question: How could Rivka have been the perfect wife for Yitzchak if she did not even have a womb?

Actually, the Torah's treatment of the theme of deceitfulness is quite complex. Esav is presented as a deceiver (25:28 and 26:34, with Rashi); on the other hand, Yaakov apparently deceives his father Yitzchak to receive the blessings. Yaakov is in turn deceived by Leah, when she turns out to be his bride, rather than Rachel (29:22-25). While Esav is condemned for his deceptions (see Rashi to 26:34), God ratifies the deceitful actions of Yaakov and Rachel. Apparently, while deceitfulness as a character trait is certainly considered a moral degeneracy, deceitful behavior is not always condemned.

In addition, the capacity to deceive actually contains important character virtues. One can only deceive another if one has an understanding of him, if one is able to see reality from his perspective. This is an ability that one can put to good use in numerous ways, such as in doing a chessed that is truly meaningful for another, or in educating or helping to lead another to make better choices in his life. This ability to see the world from another's perspective can also be developed to help one appreciate God's perspective on the world. The capacity to deceive also implies the ability to imagine and work towards a different reality than the one that currently exists.

Thus, the fact that Rivka came from a deceitful family did not disqualify her from being Yitzchak's wife, because the qualities that this family heritage gave her could be - and were - put to good use. Indeed, these qualities enabled her to overcome even the fact that she did not have a womb, for she was able to appreciate that from God's perspective the lack of a womb is not determinative. She was able to imagine and work towards the goal of her being a mother, even though it did not appear congruent with the reality in this world.

About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org.

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