BS”D

Parshas Toldos 5776

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Rivkah’s Role

After Yaakov succeeds with his mother’s help in receiving his father Yitzchok’s blessing, Esav says to himself that as soon as his father dies, he will kill his brother Yaakov.

Rivkah learns of this and tells Yaakov that his life is in danger. She tells him to flee to Charan to her brother-in-law Lavan. She says he should stay there for a while until Esav’s anger abates. Then she’ll send word to Yaakov that it’s safe to come home.

Now Rivkah tells Yitzchok that she cannot tolerate Yaakov’s marrying a Hittite woman. Obviously, she is hinting that he should go to Charan to find a wife. Yitzchok agrees with Rivkah. He summons Yaakov and tells him not to marry a Canaanite woman. He should go to Aram and find a wife from among the daughters of his uncle Lavan.

My first question is why was Rivkah not more direct? She did not tell Yitzchok that Yaakov’s life was in danger. To Yaakov, she says to go to Lavan to hide while to Yitzchok she implies he should go there to find a wife.

Secondly, one wonders why Yaakov did not seek a wife until then. After all, he was at least 63 years old at this point. Esav had gotten married at 40 like his father. Why had Yaakov waited?

The commentaries that I saw do answer the first question. They do not, however, raise the second question.

Before answering these questions, let’s see how the commentaries understand some of the verses preceding Rivkah’s request to Yitzchok.

“Esav harbored a grudge against Yaakov… Esav said to himself, ‘Let the mourning period of my father come, and I will kill my brother Yaakov.’ Rivkah was told about the words of her older son Esav. She sent for and called her younger son Yaakov and said to him, ‘Your brother Esav is consoling himself by planning to kill you.’” (Breishis 27: 41,42)

If Esav “said to himself,” how did Rivkah know his plans? Also, why does he refer to Yaakov as his “brother” since killing him is hardly a brotherly thing to do?

Some commentaries say that in fact Esav was torn. He wanted to kill Yaakov for “stealing” the blessings. But at the same time he felt he was his brother; how can you kill your brother?

On the other hand, the Be’er Mayim Chaim says that Esav was waiting for an excuse to kill Yaakov. When their father Yitzchok would die, that would be a perfect time for a fight to break out about the inheritance. Meanwhile, though, Esav acts like Yaakov is his brother. He acts as if he’s not angry at all and in fact feels brotherly.

The term [Esav] is “consoling himself” that Rivkah uses can be understood as if Esav is acting as if he’s consoled over the loss of the blessings. Bygones are bygones. But in reality, it’s just a ruse to be able to kill Yaakov at the right time.

Rashi says that Rivkah knew Esav’s thoughts with Divine inspiration (Ruach HaKodesh). The Midrash elaborates: The matriarchs were prophetess. In Tehillim it says, “Do not touch my anointed ones; do not harm my prophets.” (105:15) The anointed ones are the patriarchs; the prophets are the matriarchs.

Perhaps Rivkah is a greater prophet than Yitzchok just as Sarah was a greater prophet than Avraham. She knew that the younger son would dominate the older one as she was told QUOTE??? She knew that Esav wanted to kill Yaakov. But Yitzchok did not know these things.

Yet even though Rivkah knew it was imperative for Yaakov to flee for his life, she did not share that information with her husband. It would have served no purpose for Yitzchok to know that. In fact, it would break his heart to hear that his beloved son Esav was contemplating fratricide. Also, the Be’er Mayim Chaim adds, it would be disrespectful of Rivkah to tell Yitzchok something she had learned through *ruach hakodesh* that he had not been privy to.

Let’s turn to the question of Yaakov’s marriage.

It may be that there was no prohibition, at least early on, of Yaakov’s marrying a woman outside of his family, perhaps even a Canaanite. Of course, Yitzchok was forbidden to marry a Canaanite, but that ban did not necessarily apply to his children.

Who did Yaakov’s children marry?

Rashi (Breishis 37:35) quotes the argument of the sages as to who Yaakov’s sons married. Rabbi Yehuda says they married their twin sisters. Rabbi Nechemia says they married Canaanite women. To be sure, the Ramban (38:2) says that Rabbi Nechemia didn’t really mean Canaanites, just women from varioius other nations. Nevertheless, the simple meaning is that, according to Rabbi Nechemia’s opinion, they did indeed marry Canaanites, and it was not forbidden.

According to this point of view, perhaps Yaakov did not set out earlier to find a wife in Aram because a local wife might have been acceptable had Yaakov found the right woman.

But events turned out to be otherwise. Esav did marry local women. As the Torah tells us, they were a source of bitterness to Yitzchok and Rivkah.

When Rivkah expressed her distress at the thought that Yaakov marry a local Canaanite (Hittite) woman, she was not just looking for an excuse to get Yaakov out of the country. She had come to the conclusion that although there was no actual prohibition against Yaakov’s marrying a local woman, it would be disastrous for him to do so.

Yitchok agreed and told Yaakov to find a wife from among his uncle’s daughters in Padan Aram.

I’m suggesting that just as it was Rivkah who secured Yitzchok’s blessing for Yaakov; it was also she who realized that it was imperative for Yaakov to not marry a Canaanite.

The rest is history as the saying goes. Yaakov was successful in creating a family that became the core of the Jewish people by marrying the daughters of Lavan: Leah and Rachel and their handmaidens or half-sisters Bilhah and Zilpah. This decision was critical; without it the Jewish people would not have been formed. So just as Sarah set the course for the creation of the Jewish people by separating Yishmael from Yitchok, so did Rivkah make the formation of the Jewish people possible by insisting that Yaakov not marry a Canaanite woman.