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Today's parasha has the titanic story of Jacob and Esau. Starting already in the womb: Good versus Evil, the Jewish world versus the Christian world, a parallel to the preceding mythic story of Isaac and Ishmael: the Jewish world versus the Arab/Islamic world.

Jacob was the conniver in the story of the lentil soup. He understood his impetuous brother, knew his weaknesses and took advantage of them.

It is also the story of Rivka. I used to think of Rivka as the prototypical Jewish Mother. Manipulative, over protective, passive aggressive, (maybe I should stop now). But yet, Rivka was also a prophet. She received G-d's word in chapter 25:23: "Two peoples are in your womb.. two nations from your innards will separate, and one nation will be strong on the account of the other, and the elder will serve the younger." Rivka takes this to heart and remembers it. She doesn't tell anyone, but resolves to use that divine insight much later. Rivka's devotion to Jacob is not a petulant favoritism but a fulfillment of Divine instruction.

The children grow into adults, Yitzhak reaches old age, and the time comes to bestow the significant blessings which will determine the future of the two sons. Yitzhak plans to bless Eisav and sends him out to hunt and prepare a meal for him, to create a conducive atmosphere for this meaningful event.

Rivka, hearing of the plan, realizes that she now needs to step in. Once again, however, she chooses to bypass confrontation at all costs and concocts a scheme: She will masquerade Yaakov as Eisav, allowing Yitzhak to be tricked into giving him the blessing. This is so bizarre and devious that it rivals those relatives whose character traits she worked so hard all these years to avoid!

Why did Rivka not appreciate that perhaps the time had come to explain to Yitzhak his mistaken perception of Eisav? Why not tell him of the prophecy that she heard before the birth: "And the elder shall serve the younger"?

In this episode, we see the timidity with which Rivka always interacted with Yitzhak collide head to head with her steadfast commitment to fulfill her mission and preserve the truth.

In respectful deference to Yitzhak, she could not confront him about his mistake. So by tricking Yitzhak, and allowing him to experience himself the results of this deceit by the eventual arrival of the "real" Eisav, Rivka accomplished two key things:

1) Yitzhak would give the blessings to Yaakov with a full heart, not having been persuaded to give them by his wife.

2) Through realizing that he'd been tricked, Yitzhak would experientially appreciate the existence of deceit, of things not being as they seem. This would prove to him – more than any rational words – that Eisav, too, had been fooling him all along. Yitzhak would then understand that it was God's will for Yaakov to receive the blessings, and for Yitzhak to be saved from his own folly and lack of understanding.

When looked at from this perspective, we can appreciate what an ingenious, purposeful, respectful way of dealing with differences of opinion! The text makes no further mention of the matter (along the lines of "I told you so"), aside from Yitzhak's ready admission and sudden epiphany when Eisav returns in anticipation of receiving the blessing:

Yitzhak shook with a great fear and said, "Who, then, hunted and gave me to eat and I blessed him? In fact, let him remain blessed." (Genesis 27:33)

Yitzhak concludes:

If this trick could happen to me, then I know I may have been fooled my whole life. Therefore, Yaakov should remain blessed, for he is the one deserving of the blessing.

How painful it must have been for Rivka to have to "steal" the blessing from her husband. Although it is clear to her that Yaakov is to continue the line and mission of the Jewish people, by the command of God, she still equally loves Eisav. Differently from her predecessor, Sarah, she has to create the separation within her own home between two of her own sons, and allow them each to develop into the nations they are meant to be, without wishing either any harm:

Rivka was aware of Eisav's words (that he wanted to kill Yaakov), so she sent and called Yaakov and said, "Your brother, Eisav, wants to kill you... Go run away to my brother, Lavan... until his anger abates... for how can I lose both of you at one time?" (Genesis 27:42-43)

Rivka is concerned that one might kill the other, either out of revenge or in self-defense. Either way, were that to happen, she would lose the other as well as the murderer of his brother. As she sends Yaakov away to her family which she rejected so long before, Rivka intends this for the good of both her sons:

Yaakov went to Padan Aram, to Lavan, the brother of Rivka, (who was) the mother of Yaakov and Eisav. (Genesis 28:5)

Rivka's name literally means "a yoke used to join two animals of the same species together, to fulfill a purpose or work together in the fields."

To the end, this matriarch, true to her name, serves as the yoke trying to hold two disparate nations together, to fulfill God's ultimate purpose.

The only actual conversation recorded in the Torah between Rivka and Yitzhak involves finding a marriage partner for Yaakov.

Rivka said to Yitzhak: "I'm sick of my life because of the Hittite women (Eisav's wives). Let Yaakov travel to Haran... for if Yaakov marries a woman from Canaan, my life would be pointless..." (Genesis 27:46)

Spoken like a true mother-in-law! Rivka is protecting Yitzhak from the news that his sons are at war with each other, and that Yaakov has to flee Eisav's wrath for fear of being killed. Instead, in a seemingly selfish manner, she asks Yitzhak to do her the favor of giving Yaakov advice to leave Canaan to find a wife. Then, Yitzhak, as if on his own accord, gives Yaakov his approval and tells him to go to Haran, to Rivka's family, to try his luck there at finding his soulmate.

Even at this late stage, as Rivka finally brings herself to confront Yitzhak and ask for something, it is out of great kindness and selflessness. She doesn't want to burden him with painful information about their sons, nor does she want him to dwell on his misconceived impression of Eisav. She even tries to make it seem like Yaakov leaving town is Yitzhak's idea to begin with.

This is what kindness and giving should be in a marriage. A marriage is when two different people care about each other, and give so much to each other that they recapture the initial oneness of that dual male-female human that preceded the separation of Eve from Adam. It's no longer "my needs against yours... I was right and you were wrong," but rather: "Your pain is my pain, your self-respect is my need, just as much as my own."

In Hebrew, the word for acts of kindness is "Gemilut Chesed" - literally: the weaning of kindness. (Gemilut means "to wean off.") Isn't this a contradiction in terms? Weaning means to distance oneself and create separation, while kindness means to give, connect and join.

We see from here that true kindness is to give the recipient the feeling that he is not receiving at all; rather that he is completely independent and weaned from you. Otherwise, the bit of shame that the recipient inevitably feels would make the kindness less complete.

This is the type of goodness which God bestows upon us: He gives us everything, but makes us think that we are working to arrange it and that we deserve it. (When in fact God is orchestrating everything!) This is the method we should emulate in marriage: We give to our partner, without giving the feeling that we are in charge and the benefactors.

This is Rivka's essence: From the time we first meet her, as she tirelessly and effortlessly draws water for man and beast, then in her marriage to Yitzhak and the birth of her sons, she influences them to do what she knows is best, but never at the expense of their self-respect.

With this understanding look at Rivka as a true mother of our people and Divine conduit to influence our people far into the future. Shabbat Shalom.