

**Parshat Toldot:
Debating the Future:
Insights in the Dispute Between Yitzchak and Rivka
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When we confront a dispute in the gemara or in the Shulchan Arukh, the first question we ask is, "What are they arguing about?" In this week's parsha, we encounter a dispute between Yitzchak and Rivka regarding which son should receive the covenantal blessing, Esav or Yaakov. Here too, we must ask "What are they arguing about?"

Allow me to suggest the following: Both Yitzchak and Rivka understood that to continue the mission of Avraham, an Avraham-type personality was needed. Avraham was a man of kindness but, most importantly, he was a pioneer. He was the one who had the courage and vision to heed God's call of לך לך. Yitzchak was blind, both physically and emotionally. He survived the *akeidah* but never overcame the experience. Yitzchak saw things as they were. Yitzchak favored Esav because Esav knew how to cater to that straightforward personality. Esav brought his father food. We can imagine that the food was prepared exactly the way his father liked it. And, he always provided the food quickly, not an easy feat when you had to hunt for your own dinner. Yitzchak saw in this honor that his son gave him, an active and respectful personality. For Yitzchak, this simple action of *kibud av*, provided the Abrahamic model that he was looking for.

Rivka, on the other hand, appreciated the subtlety of Avraham's life. In last week's parsha, Avraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son who exhibited the same traits that characterized Avraham. Therefore, it was critical that not only Rivka exhibit *chesed*, but also she was willing to leave her family and travel to a foreign land for an unknown man. She understood that an Abrahamic personality needed more than simple acts of obedience. It is not clear from the parsha what Rivka saw in Yaakov that led her to choose him as her favorite one. However, as the story unfolds, Rivka's choice is proven correct. Yaakov is also willing to travel to a foreign land to build a family and continue the dream. By the time he returns to the land of Avraham and Yitzchak, his role as the successor is solidified.

Yitzchak and Rivka argue about the characteristics that would define the next link in the chain of the covenant and the characteristics that define the Jewish people. Rivka appreciated the fact that the pioneering spirit requires the ability to take risks and to confront uncertainty strengthened by the sense of mission that both Avraham and Rivka exhibited. The embodiment of these traits continues to be our challenge and our mission, in good time and in more difficult ones. Let us all rise to the challenge.



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