

Parashat Toldot – Hazzan Yishai Rackovsky

This month we marked the second *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sack, of blessed memory, former chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, who was one of the pillars of our generation and a great Jewish scholar. Rabbi Sacks gave a beautiful teaching from the coming week's Shabbat Torah Portion: Toldot. *May this dvar be in his honor.*

The Parsha tells us of Isaac's two different sons - Esau and Jacob.

We learn that Isaac who had a taste for wild game, loved his son Esau, but his wife, Rebecca, loved her son Jacob. It's clear to us why Rebecca loved Jacob over Esau, because she was told that "two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23) Jacob was the younger son, that was referred to. Rebecca wanted the legacy of Abraham and Isaac to continue further onto the next generations, and she knew that it would be done with Jacob rather than with her other son Esau.

The main question is why did Isaac love Esau?

Didn't he see that Esau married a Hittite Woman? That he is wild? That he is a hunter who lived outdoors? Is that the right son in Isaac's eyes to carry on the legacy of Abraham?

The Torah told us Isaac became blind when he became old, but could it be that he was so blind as not to see all these problematic characters in his son Esau?

In one occasion, it is stressed that Isaac didn't like Esau - after he married two Hittite women.

The Torah says that his marriage caused Isaac and Rebecca had much. Esau was not the right person to be chosen as to carry on Abraham's legacy, as the Hittite's were literally the opposite of all that Judaism represents and what Abraham represented. This was clearly noticed by Isaac, but yet the Torah keeps saying that he loved Esau. How can it be?

The story of the stolen blessings by Jacob over his brother Esau is a good example of the special connection of Isaac and Esau. The love between Esau and Isaac is stressed when Isaac asks Esau to prepare him the delicious food he used to bring him, and even more so at the end of the story, when both Isaac and Esau realize what Jacob made, so at this point Esau is almost begging his father to also give him some blessings, and his father indeed listens to him and arises from his bed to bless him. It's more than surprising that although usually we can barely find an expression of emotions in the Torah, here the Torah expressed the feelings that both father and son had. Isaac "trembled violently." Esau "burst out with a loud and bitter cry." (Gen. 27:33-34)

Then what made Isaac love Esau in such depth despite everything; his wildness, his mutability, and his marriages? The Sages interpret the phrase "skillful hunter" to mean that Esau trapped and deceived Isaac. He pretended to be more religious than he was. There is, though, quite a different explanation, closer to the plain sense of the text — Isaac loved Esau because Esau was his son, and that is what parents do. They love their children unconditionally.

Loving his son does not mean that he agreed with how Esau lived his life. It doesn't mean that he liked the woman he chose to marry. We know he didn't like that, but Isaac knew that after all, Esau is his son, and that bond is unbreakable, no matter what. With that Isaac was teaching us a fundamental lesson in parenthood.

Why Isaac? Because he saw his father Abraham torn after throwing out his son Ismael, and we have some Midrashim which even suggest that Abraham made efforts and met with Ismael after throwing him from home. Also the trial of binding left an impact on Isaac and the unconditional love of Esau is somewhat a tikkun for the rupture in the father-son relationship brought about by the bond.

It's true also in the relationship between us and God - God as *Avinu shebashamyim* - even if sometimes we do not follow Him, and He is disappointed in us, we are still his sons, and if we feel disappointed and don't go after him, he is still our father, and this will never change. It seems that this is what Isaac intended to teach us by the way he dealt with Esau. Unconditional love he taught us, is not uncritical, but it is unbreakable. That is how we should love our children – for it is how God loves us.