

“When Eisav was forty years old, he took a wife...and they were a source of spiritual rebellion to Yitzchak and Rivkah.” (26:34-35)

Eisav followed in his father's ways by marrying at the age of forty. That is all that he did like his father. The women he married were from a nation whose evil nature and low moral standard equaled that of Eisav. Indeed, with these marriages, Eisav forever broke his ties with Avraham *Avinu's* mission. The Torah states that these women *were a source of spiritual rebellion to Yitzchak and Rivkah*. “Why does Yitzchak's name precede Rivkah's?”, queries the *Midrash*. The response is that Yitzchak was much more affected by the spiritual filth of idol worship that Eisav's wives brought into their house than Rivkah was. Yitzchak descended from *kedoshim*, holy, virtuous parents who left a lasting imprint of holiness and purity on him. On the other hand, Rivkah came from a house that was a center for idolatry, thereby dulling her sensitivity to the impurity of idol worship.

Let us attempt to digest the words of the *Midrash*. When Rivkah left her father's home, she was three-years-old. Even at that young age, she was exemplary in her virtue and piety. Indeed, *Chazal* refer to her as a rose among thorns. As soon as she arrived in Yitzchak's home, those spiritual amenities that had ceased as a result of Sarah *Imeinu's* death returned. At the time of Eisav's marriage, Rivkah had already spent sixty years in Yitzchak's home. She was acutely aware of what Eisav was, the evil that he wrought and the malevolence that he embodied – more aware than Yitzchak. Yet, the *Midrash* claims that her sensitivity to the spiritual filth of idol worship was not as acute as Yitzchak's. Is it that the three years spent by the *tzadeikes* in her father's home had an everlasting and detrimental effect on her?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, z.l., explains this phenomenon in the following manner. He cites *Chazal* in the *Yerushalmi Chagiga* 2:1 who explain the *pasuk* in *Koheles* 7:8, “The end of a matter is better than its beginning.” When is the “end” better? Only when it is good from the “beginning.” A tree that is developed can be transplanted to another place, and flourish, even if the conditions are not exactly suitable for it. A young shoot's future growth and strength on the other hand, is determined by the earth in which it had originally been planted. It can only survive in an area similar to its original planting.

This idea applies similarly to Rivkah. The sensitivities that were ingrained in her as a young child left an indelible impression – one that is not superseded by her righteousness, moral character, and many years of living in the home of Avraham and Yitzchak. The impression was ingrained in her psyche. Growing up with Lavan, even for three years – but three years of impressionable youth – leaves a taint. She did not abhor the idol worship of her daughters-in-law, as much as her husband Yitzchak did.

Rav Goldvicht submits that this is the defining point in understanding the difference between a

tzaddik ben tzaddik and a *tzaddik ben rasha*, a righteous son of righteous lineage and a righteous son who has overcome the evil effect of his evil forbears. Without a doubt, the righteous son who triumphed over his environment and lineage deserves tremendous credit. He is strong; he is resolute, he has achieved what a *tzaddik ben tzaddik* could not achieve. He withstood trial by fire and prevailed. Yet, the righteous son who grew up in an environment alien to virtue, antithetical to moral rectitude, devoted to idol worship in its many forms, cannot achieve the *shleimus taharas hanefesh*, perfect purity of soul, as the *tzaddik ben tzaddik*. His psyche has been desensitized – in a sense – to certain evil, to the point that he will not feel the same negativity and abhorrence as his counterpart. This makes one's youth, his early years in *yeshivah*, his teenage years followed by his tenure in *bais ha'medrash*, so much more crucial. It is the defining time of his life. It is the time that leaves the most indelible imprimatur on him, on his character, both spiritual and moral. The way he *davens*, his approach to studying Torah; his attitude towards *mussar*, ethics; in fact, the entire time spent in the *yeshivah* will determine what type of observant adult he will be. "The end of a matter is better than the beginning"-only if the beginning is good.