

And Hashem said to her: Two nations are in your womb; two regimes from your insides shall be separated. (25:23)

Rashi explains that the two nations which would descend from the twins within Rivkah's womb would have two great leaders who were friends. Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*, known as *Rebbi*, was the redactor of the *Mishnah*. His contemporary was the Roman emperor, Antoninus, a descendant of Eisav. The **Chasam Sofer** explains that Rivkah was informed that the twins, Yaakov and Eisav, had the potential to complement one another's service to Hashem, much like Yissacher who studied Torah supported by his brother, Zevulun. We find that Antoninus was subservient to *Rebbi* to the point that he enabled him to redact the *Mishnah*. In the End of Days, the "good aspect" of the gentile nations will serve the Jewish People and help them to serve Hashem

What was the origin of the relationship between Antoninus and *Rebbi*? After all, it is not as if they went to the same schools or lived in the same neighborhood. **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, quotes *Tosfos* in *Meseches Avodah Zarah* 10b, which is embellished by *Menoras HaMaor* 53. Apparently, the Roman government decreed that the Jews were not permitted to circumcise their sons. When *Rebbi* was born, his father, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, conjectured, "Hashem enjoined us to circumcise our sons. The Roman government prohibited us from doing this. To whom should I listen – Hashem or the Romans?" Rabbi Shimon circumcised his child. The Roman mayor questioned Rabbi Shimon concerning his insubordination against the Roman government. When Rabbi Shimon gave his rationale, the mayor insisted that Rabbi Shimon travel to the emperor and explain himself.

It was a day's travel to Rome. On the way, they stopped at an inn where the innkeeper's wife had just given birth to a son, Antoninus. When Rabbi Shimon's wife explained their predicament, Antoninus's mother took pity and suggested that they switch babies. One can imagine the rest of the story: The mayor accused Rabbi Shimon of circumcising his son. When they removed the blanket, they discovered that the infant was uncircumcised. The mayor was relieved of his position, as well as of his life, and everybody lived happily ever after. When they returned home, Rabbi Shimon's wife remarked to her new friend, the mother of Antoninus, "Since Hashem performed a miracle through your son, my son and yours will be friends for life." *Chazal* add that, because Antoninus nursed from *Rebbi*'s mother, he merited learning Torah, supporting *Rebbi*, and eventually becoming a ger, converting to Judaism.

In his commentary to *Sefer Devarim*, *Parashas Va'eschanan*, the **Megaleh Amukos** teaches that *Rebbi* was a *gilgul*, transmigrative soul, of Yaakov *Avinu*, and Antoninus possessed the "good" *nitzutz*, spark, of Eisav. In other words, the twins – who were biologically formed from one seed which, in turn, created twins – set the stage for the relationship between *Rebbi* and Antoninus, to whom we are responsible for the *Torah She' Baal Peh*, redaction of the Oral Law. This is how Rivkah was assuaged concerning her troubled pregnancy. Although one of her twins "ran" toward the idols, he would produce a progeny that would support his brother's descendant in

illuminating the hearts and minds of the Jewish People. All of this was the result of Antoninus nursing from Rivkah! After all, he was a descendant, a *nitzutz* of Eisav, who had nursed from Rivkah *Imeinu*. That act of nursing preserved and eventually brought out whatever good spark was embedded deep within Eisav, so that it would emerge through Antoninus.

Chazal (*Pesikta Rabbasi* 44:4) teach that when Sarah *Imeinu* gave birth to Yitzchak, some pagan skeptics claimed that Yitzchak was actually the son of the maidservant. Avraham *Avinu* said, "This is not a time for modesty." Sarah was instructed to nurse any child that was brought to her. The children of those who were sincere, and brought their children to be nursed out of a sense of respect for Sarah, eventually converted. The children of those who came out of a sense of skepticism became great and important leaders. In any event, every *ger*, convert, is somehow the descendant of a child nursed by Sarah *Imeinu*.

The **Arizal** writes that, embedded within Eisav's head (his mouth, for he was *tzayid b'fiv*, game was in his mouth; it was the part of his body which relegated some form of good, based upon the *halachic* queries he rendered with his mouth) were holy sparks which produced Shmaya and Avtalyon, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva. Thus, Eisav's head was buried in the *Meoras HaMachpeilah*, where it belonged. Rav Friedman suggests that Eisav merited this as a result of nursing from Rivkah. Imbibing the milk of the righteous Rivkah imbued Eisav with a quality in his mouth that allowed his mouth to become the medium for harboring the holy sparks which produced these great *Taanaim*.

We now understand how Antoninus's life was changed because he nursed from the wife of Rabbi Shimon. What about the holy Rebbe, however? Why should his holy mouth have nursed from Antoninus's mother? Turning to the *Chasam Sofer*, Rav Friedman derives a principle upon which he builds a compelling explanation for the need for *Rebbi* to nurse from the gentile woman. The Torah relates that, prior to presenting himself to Yitzchak, Rivkah had Yaakov don Eisav's garments. Simply, this would give more validity to the ruse that Yaakov was Eisav. The *Chasam Sofer* explains that this move was necessary. The clothes of a person have an influence upon him. The clothes worn by a righteous person retain an element of *kedushah*, holiness. Likewise, the garments of a *rasha*, evil person, maintain an element of his impure essence.

Yaakov, as a paradigm of *emes*, truth, found it almost impossible to participate in the necessary ruse to save the blessings. It went against everything that he was. Thus, Rivkah determined that if Yaakov were to wear the clothes of the evil, lying Eisav, he might be sufficiently influenced to believe that the bending of the truth was necessary and should not bother him. Because Yaakov wore the clothes of Eisav, he was able to act for Heaven's sake in order to save the blessings in what might be viewed by some as an inappropriate manner.

Likewise, *Rebbi* redacted the Oral Law, despite the rule that what is oral may not be written. *Rebbi* figured that the situation warranted an immediate revolutionary response. Illiteracy was rampant. The Torah was being forgotten as people moved away from it, and the persecutors of the Roman

government were becoming a greater deterrent to study Torah. In response, he decided to redact the Oral Law onto paper, in order that it become available to everyone. Was it right? It was necessary to save Torah, so it became right.

Rebbi had a spark of Yaakov within him, thus making it difficult to act in a manner not totally coincident with the truth. An *aveirah lishmah*, sin committed for the sake of Heaven, still maintains some vestige of sin. By imbibing milk from a gentile, to a certain extent, *Rebbi* became desensitized, thereby encouraging him to record the Oral Law in written form.

Once again, we realize how little we know and how much more we have to learn.