



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית  
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

BSD

## **Parashat Toledot**

### **Parental Leadership**

#### **-Rabbi Yehuda Yesharim-**

One definition of leadership is guidance of others toward a common goal. The ability to generate change and to motivate others is critical when it comes to this definition of leadership.

When we contemplate the term "leader," we generally visualize figures that served as heads of state, were great generals or revolutionaries. There is a famous story of a man who set out to change the world. After finding himself unsuccessful in his venture he consulted his rabbi, who suggested he attempt to change his country. After failing there as well, the man followed the rabbi's further suggestion to change his city, and after failing there too he ultimately understood that he had to first set out to change himself, since all change begins with the individual and spreads from within.

This story demonstrates that leadership can be found on a smaller scale as well, although, regardless of scale, it must remain steadfast in its goals and principles while demonstrating flexibility and unity.

These goals and principles can be found in our parasha as well. Yitzchak and Rivka form a parental couple faced with the challenge of directing their children down a path of values and morality, which leads to faith in the Creator of the universe and adherence to His commandments. In this endeavor they are forced to demonstrate flexibility. "Educate a child according to his way": our Sages teach that each child has his or her own way. Every child has a different character and parents must find ways to touch him or her in a way that resonates with the particular child. This does not mean that parents must compromise their values or goals, but rather that they must demonstrate flexibility when it comes to the path they choose in order to achieve such goals.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch criticizes Yitzchak and Rivka for their lack of educational flexibility: "As the boys were growing it became more and more apparent how completely different they were in character and way of life. From a remark of our Sages we learn that this evergrowing conflict was partly due to faulty education. ... Yaakov and Esav just do not fit on one school bench. If Esav's parents had come early to the sad conclusion that their son was not at all inclined towards spiritual activities, they might have succeeded in developing his good traits to such an extent that he could still have been called a worthy grandson of Avraham. ... If only Yitzchak and Rivka had delved into the depths of Esav's soul ... perhaps the boy who was to become a "man of the field" would have become a "man of God" ... and who knows what effect that may have had on the turning of future events." According to Rabbi Hirsch, Yitzchak and Rivka should have noticed the differences in



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character between their twin boys and adapted their educational methods to account for these differences while still maintaining their educational goals.

Unity is another fundamental and critical element of parental leadership. Parents must speak with one voice. Our Sages teach this principle in the context of the wayward and rebellious son, who does not acquire his rebellious title until his parents are equal in voice, appearance and height (BT Sanhedrin 71a). How can two people be identical in voice, appearance and height? Has there ever been a husband and wife couple completely identical in voice, appearance and height? What our Sages are teaching is that parents must transmit unified messages to their children and only then, if the child strays from the path of the straight and narrow, then the child is to blame. However, if the parents transmit mixed, conflicting or inconsistent messages to their child, then the blame for the child's descent into rebelliousness rests on the parents. Yitzchak and Rivka loved their children. This is a fundamental precept of parenting. However, they were not identical in their love: "And Yitzchak loved Esav ... while Rivka loved Yaakov." This was the beginning of the disagreement between the parents, a disagreement that led to inconsistency in the parental leadership displayed by Yitzchak and Rivka. Ultimately, Rivka would convince Yaakov to deceitfully present himself as Esav in order to receive the blessings of the first born from Yitzchak. Here too, Rabbi Hirsch comments as follows: "The parents' feelings with regard to their children differed from each other, which in fact could not have but undue influence on the children. Uniformity of opinion in education and equal love to all children – even those who are not perfect in character ... are basic precepts and foundations of education." Despite the fact that both boys grew up and were educated in the same home, they adopted for themselves differing goals and principles, the results of which became Edom and Israel, complete opposites of each other.

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