

Deception

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

How can we revere a man like Jacob, Yaakov, who, it seems from the text of the Torah, cheated his own father? The Torah after all puts respecting one's parents before all the other ethical rules for human behavior!

Yet the fact is that Yaakov only acted because his mother insisted. He kept on repeating that this was deceptive, that his father might find out and curse him. If you read the text carefully you will see that he was clearly unwilling. His mother, remember, had received a vision or revelation when she was pregnant, in which she had been told that the younger son would be given primacy over the elder. She was in a sense merely following Divine instructions. The whole charade was because Isaac was no longer completely in control of his faculties.

Besides, Yitzhak, himself kept on wondering who it really was before him, he obviously had his doubts. So why did he not simply refuse to give any blessing until he was certain? Couldn't he have waited a day and called both sons in together at the same time?

Really, we have to see this as a message about inheritance, not just material but spiritual too. Esav had already shown over the bowl of soup that he didn't much care for what happened in the future. He was concerned with the present. And he was far too impetuous, not the best quality for leadership. Yes, he had some good qualities and that was why his father wanted to test him, to test both the boys to see which one would prove the better long term leader, to see if Yaakov was prepared to go against his nature and fight for something so significant.

Rivka knew there was no contest, that Yaakov had the qualities to lead the tribe into the glorious future. But she had to find a way of persuading her husband to appreciate the qualities she saw in her younger son. So, she pushes Yaakov to go that extra mile, to extend himself, to go to the limit. Because she knew that once her husband realized how much it mattered to Yaakov he would change his mind. And he did. Despite his reservations, he gave Yaakov the blessing, the spiritual blessing to carry the torch of Avraham into the next generation. He gave Yaakov the blessing of Avraham. He did not have to. He could have argued when Esav came home that he had been misled and take the blessing back. But he let it stand. He understood that 'someone' was sending him a message. And that's a sign of greatness in Yitschak and equally in Yaakov, to hope that if you are doing something for the right motives and with sincerity, in the end it will be what God wants too.