

Emotion or Logic

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

When one reads the story of how Rivkah pushed her son Yaakov to deceive his father into giving him the blessings instead of to Esav, we usually tend to think about the deceit. We overlook other factors. What happens when an unsuitable candidate seems to be heading for a position of such importance that if the wrong or a corrupt person gets the position he will completely subvert the ideals of the founder? Should one stand by when a clear mistake is being made? Should one be bound by the tradition or convention of preference for the first born or rather the best person for the job? Indeed, a similar conundrum faced Yaakov himself when he replaced Reuven, his first born, with Yehudah.

Some people tend to respect legal systems, rules and traditions. Others are so driven by a passionate belief in what they believe to be right that they feel a powerful need to achieve the correct end as they see it. They are prepared to sacrifice the niceties of procedure. Everything about Rivkah's past suggests she is a good, wise and loving person. How could she do this? Here, the father stands for the law, the ancient right of the first born. The mother stands for the best man for the job.

The Torah in effect gives us both ways, the narrative of the mother's passion and the narrative of the father, order and system. The Torah often gives us conflicting messages. Both may be right under different circumstances. Life is not always 'black' or 'white.' We have to choose the appropriate course of action to take in the circumstances.