



The Value of Opposition

The extreme competitiveness of the political parties this year reached a fevered pitch that tops anything I can remember from the past. You might be surprised to learn that this kind of epic struggle actually has somewhat of a parallel in the Torah.

In the Torah portion of Toldot, Isaac and Rebecca finally conceive after many years of trying. But Rebecca realizes that there is an unusual pattern of movement in her womb, so she goes to inquire about it from a prophet. The answer she receives is: "There are two nations in your womb; two powers will diverge from inside you and the upper hand shall pass from one power to the other and the elder shall serve the younger." Whatever this meant in terms of the course of national history, the statement "two powers reside within you" teaches a fundamental truth about life.

While we normally think of our greatest challenges as those emanating from without – for example, relationships, work, accidents – the truth is that the most important and significant challenges come from the 'enemy' within: arrogance, inferiority complexes, depression, lack of motivation, negative self-image or a general difficulty to stay focused on the task at hand. One of the reasons that we have such a difficult time overcoming these internal obstacles is because we don't recognize where it comes from and the toll they are taking.

This is where the Torah story comes in:

The human being was created with two opposing drives inside. One, the G-dly, is a drive to do good and accomplish our life's mission. The other, the animalistic, is our egocentric drive which stands in opposition to those ends. The struggle between them is epic and life-long. This opposition is empowered by G-d to use every conceivable tactic or device to undermine us in our pursuit of noble objectives. In the end, however, as the verse states, "the elder shall serve the younger" – the elder referring to the egocentric drive, which takes root the moment we are born, and the younger being the G-dly soul which only fully takes root after Bat and Bar Mitzvah – because ultimately, the power of good is stronger and will prevail if we put in the proper effort.

This struggle may evolve over time to manifest itself in different challenges, but it is never over for as long as we live. While this may sound negative and depressing, the fact is that it is the opposition that gives our accomplishments meaning and value.

Winning without opposition is an empty achievement.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan

My Own Eisav

Twins usually have a lot in common. Even though they may go in two separate directions, the basis of each is often something in common. For example, one may be a *shochet* (butcher) and the other might be a *mohel* who performs circumcisions, but it can be a common propensity to spill blood that drove each in the direction of their professions.

Seemingly, Ya'akov and Eisav were an exception. They looked nothing like each other, and they certainly acted like complete opposites. Yet, the Kehillas Ya'akov says that Eisav was supposed to have been the fourth forefather, just as there were for four foremothers. And *Dovid HaMelech*, ancestor of *Moshiach Ben Dovid*, had a lot in common with Eisav, being red and ruddy and having blood on his hands. Perhaps this is why Dovid asked God to make him the fourth father.

Furthermore, let's not forget a very important fact. As the *parsha* says, Yitzchak loved Eisav most. He obviously loved Ya'akov very much, but he loved Eisav more. And though the Torah seems to say this was just the result of Eisav's power of deception, *Kabbalah* says it is because both Yitzchak and Eisav came from same spiritual root, *Gevurah*. Though Yitzchak and Eisav look more like opposites to us than Ya'akov and Eisav, Yitzchak saw something of himself inside his son, and tried to bring it out.

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Yitzchak was not wrong. Eisav has produced some amazingly righteous people. The prophet Ovadiah was a convert from Edom. The Roman ruler Antoninus was an admirer and supporter of Rebi Yehudah HaNasi (*Avodah Zarah* 10b). Many descendants of Eisav have put their own lives on the line to save Jews over the ages.

And the opposite has been true as well. Centuries of assimilation have proven just how Eisav-like Jews can be, some even "converting" to Christianity and rising up high in the Church. There are stories of Nazis being "impressed" with just how cruel Kapos could be to their own. And of course, there is this from the *Gemora*:

The ways and nature of these people, the Jews, are like fire. Were it not for the fact that the Torah was given to the Jewish people, whose study and observance restrains them, no nation or tongue could withstand them. This is the same as what Rebi Shimon *ben* Lakish said: "There are three arrogant ones: The Jewish people among the nations ..." (Beitzah 25b)

(by Rabbi Pinchas Winston from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

Community Information of Interest

November 18: Dashed Hopes and new Horizons: The State of Israel and The Jewish People 1996 - 2000. Lecture by Rabbi Dovid Katz. *"You are now entering the Russian Zone" – The new Soviet "Diaspora" in Israel.* This lecture will begin at 8:00 p.m. and be held at the Congregation Shomrei Emunah.

Mr. Zvi and Mrs. Avital Friedman

invite the Shul to a Kiddush after davening this Shabbat
in honor of their daughter, **Devorah.**



Kol Hanaarim– Father and Son Learning – every Friday evening during the winter at 7:30 p.m. in The Shul. Cholent and other refreshments are served. Each session is 'topped off' at the end with a fascinating story. For any questions, please see Rabbi Itzkowitz.

Yahrzeits This Week:

Jeffrey London

11 Kislev - Thursday night / Friday

for father

Yaakov ben Yoseph

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DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

Friday, 11/17 — 4 Kislev

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.

Candles — 4:32 p.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:35 p.m.

Shabbat, 11/18 — 5 Kislev

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.

Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:20 a.m.

Minchah — 4:20 p.m.

Shiur — after Minchah

Ma'ariv — 5:33 p.m.

Sunday, 11/19 — 6 Kislev

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.

Monday, 11/20 — 7 Kislev

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.

Tuesday, 11/21 — 8 Kislev

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 11/22 — 9 Kislev

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.

Thursday— Thanksgiving, 11/23 — 10 Kislev

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.

Friday, 11/24 — 11 Kislev

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.

Candles — 4:28 p.m.

Minchah / Ma'ariv — 4:30 p.m.