

Parasha Toldot – The Blindness of Isaac

November 17, 2012

This is a dysfunctional family: A father who loved one son more than the other, and a mother who favored the other son, the one who wasn't so cherished by his father: *"The boys grew and Esau became a skillful hunter an outdoorsman, while Jacob was a quiet man who stayed in the tents. Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; Rebecca favored Jacob."*

The Torah doesn't prevent us for knowing the truth; after all this is not an unknown situation – it can happen in the best families. While it is normal that parents love each one of their children in different ways, unfortunately not all of them make the necessary effort to prevent their children from perceiving differences, some feeling they are less-loved and others feeling they are being over-loved (like Josef, for example).

But the real truth is that in family-relationships, like in any other system of relationships, every action has a consequence. We know perfectly that most times there are no bad intentions ("sorry, I didn't meant...") and with some experience we also realize that if we don't take care of the actions, more than of the intentions, maybe we could be paying a very expensive price. And that is exactly what happened with Isaac...

"In the course of time, after Isaac had grown old and his eyes dim, so that he couldn't see". Isaac was blind during his last days, maybe as a symbol of the blindness he carried during all his life. He did not see, or didn't want to see, how his children hated each other, how his unbalanced love for Esau, and Rebecca's for Jacob, contributed to that hatred. He could not recognize, or didn't want to recognize, that was Jacob and not Esau who was there asking for the first-born blessing and finally deceived him.

In a so dysfunctional family like this is almost impossible to say who has more responsibility than others. While Isaac was almost absent from the family dynamics, Rebecca's used her power to deceive his husband helping his favorite son to receive the blessing. However I am sure if Isaac could have had a different attitude towards life things would have been very different for this family. Probably if he could have prevented what was happening within his family, he could have avoided a story of fights and hatred between his sons which had severe consequences for the future.

What we can learn from Isaac is that we need to have our eyes wide open and to see what is happening around us. If I see a problem between my children – I need to address it as soon as I can. If I have a serious difference with my spouse or partner, I should not let pass this on or just think to “move forward”. If there is a problem or situation that could have important consequences for the future, we need to stop and say “let’s see together what is happening and how we can solve it”, because if not we will be accumulating discomfort, anxiety and worries, and the price we will be paying will grow more and more.

As in our families, we are connected with many people in our different systems of relationships: Friends, large family, neighbors, work, etc. We want to see our children happy; we want to enjoy life with them. We want to have good relationships with our family; to enjoy with our parents, uncles and cousins. We want also to be successful in our professional and academic life... And in order to achieve that success we need to address the difficulties with much faith, sincerity and courage.

May God bless us so we can do it!

Rabbi Claudio