

DIVREI TORAH FROM YESHIVOT AND SEMINARIES



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YESHIVAT ERETZ HATZVI, YERUSHALAYIM



Yeshivat Eretz HaTzvi is a leading Zionist, Modern Orthodox Yeshiva located in Jerusalem. Students engage in rigorous learning in a warm and supportive environment that prepares them for the independence of university life while rooting them firmly in Torah values.

Rabbi Todd Berman
Associate Director
& Ra"m



Yaakov and Esav

King Solomon remarked in Proverbs, “Instruct the child according to his way, and when he ages it will not leave him.” (Proverbs 22:6) Adapting to each child’s educational needs demands careful thought in order to succeed. In one of the most moving passages regarding Jewish education, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch suspects the patriarchs of not always living up to the challenge. The Torah recounts:

Isaac pleaded with the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD responded to his plea, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ... When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first one emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over; so they named him Esau. Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau; so they named him Jacob.

... When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp. Isaac loved Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Genesis 25: 21-28)

The reader knows that Esau and Jacob will eventually become competitors and enemies. The rabbis describe their struggle in national and existential terms. On the immediate level, however, Rav Hirsch uses his educational acumen to explain how the two brothers ended up on the brink of war:



Our sages, who never objected to draw attention to the small and great mistakes and weaknesses in the history of our great forefathers, and thereby make them just the more instructive for us here too, on “They grew up” make a remark which is indeed a “signpost” for all of us. They point out that the striking contrast in the grandchildren of Abraham may have been due, not so much to a difference in their temperaments as to mistakes in the way they were brought up... both had exactly the same teaching and educational treatment, and the great law of education “instruct the child according to his way” was forgotten: That each child must be treated differently,...

To try to bring up a Jacob and an Esau in the same manner, make them have the same habits and hobbies, want to teach and educate them in the same way for some studious sedate, meditative life is the surest way to court disaster. A Jacob will, with ever increasing zeal and zest, imbibe knowledge from the well of wisdom and truth while and Esau can hardly wait for the time when he can throw the old books...

Had Isaacs and Rebeca studied Esau’s nature and character enough, and asked themselves how can even an Esau with all



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the strength and energy, agility and courage that lies slumbering in this child, be won over to be used in the service of God... then Jacob and Esau, with their totally different natures could still have remained twin-brothers in spirit and life.

We need to open our hearts to both the Jacobs and the Esaus of this world

Rav Hirsch critiques the educational methodology of Isaac and Rebecca. Far from blaming the “victim” as it were of a failed system, R. Hirsch accuses the cookie cutter manner of Esau’s and Jacob’s upbringing.



40 years or so before Harvard professor Howard Earl Gardner published his famous work, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, describing the need for educators to relate to their stu-

dents’ various capabilities, the rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, spelled out his own educational theory. He begins his work, *Chovot HaTalmidim*, declaring,

King Solomon wrote, “instruct [“Chanoch”] the child according to his way, for when he ages it will not abandon him,” this is the foundation of education that not only when the person is a child and his parent’s hand is upon him that he should listen and do the mitzvoth, but also when he grows up... “Chinuch” according to Rashi ... means “beginning”. Now, it is obvious that it doesn’t mean every beginning... But rather as Rashi further explains on the verse “Chanichav” (Genesis 14:14) etc. “that [Abraham] initiates them [in the performance of] mitzvoth. This [word] expresses the beginning of initiating a person or vessel into the craft it will perform in the future...

According to Rabbi Shapira, education is bringing the unique latent potential in the child to fruition. He further elaborates:

Therefore, education is not the same for each child; it depends on each and every one according to his nature, aptitude, character etc. And it is incumbent on the educator to perceive these things...

Education, argues Rabbi Shapira as Rav Hirsch did before him, must be adapted and oriented to the qualities, abilities, and desires of each student. We need to open our hearts to both the Jacobs and the Esaus of this world. Let us begin to educate each and every child according to his or her own way. ■