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*With  
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ב"ה

Parshas Toldos

5th of Kislev 5784

## Living on Fire

Patterns in Jewish history are not just fascinating; they are often our greatest teachers. There is a running pattern throughout Jewish history in regard to the homes that our great leaders came from. The Torah, in Parshas Toldos, stresses that Rivka came from a home of tricksters and thieves. Avraham came from a home of idol-worshippers. Yitzchak's brother was Yishmael, father of Islam. Yaakov's brother was the barbaric Eisav. Rachel and Leah were children of the notorious con-artist, Lavan. Yosef married an Egyptian woman and spent most of his life alone in Egypt. Moshe grew up as the adopted son of Pharaoh, the leader of the strongest and fiercest empire ever, and ended up marrying the daughter of the local priest. Esther was an orphan growing up. Reb Akiva was raised completely unaffiliated and was illiterate. The list goes on.

### A Fire In Their Soul

Perhaps this pattern is here to teach us a powerful idea: these people did not become great **despite** their shaky upbringings; they became great **because** of it. The evil, the lies, the pain all around lit a fire underneath them, burning in their souls, determining them to correct the wrongs they were subjugated to for so long. They weren't crushed by their surroundings. They were empowered. They were inspired. They were determined. Who knows what our story would be if Reb Akiva had grown up in a normal home? Who knows what we would look like if Moshe grew up amongst a regular family on a regular block?

Now it's not to say that great leaders can't come from normal homes. But it does give encouragement to those who feel that greatness is beyond their grasp. Some people think their family simply does not have the social class or the proper makeup that is conducive to fostering greatness. People think their school, camp, background, and exposure straitjacketed them and prevented them from reaching their potential. This should teach you that perhaps Hashem put you in that place in order to fill you with heightened passion to do good. Perhaps you were placed there to come out of the gate in life running instead of walking. The pattern of our history tells us that we are who we are, not despite our upbringing, but because of it. Our job is to never lose the passion.