

D'Var Torah

Parsha Toldos

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. The Preservation of Free Choice

We read at the beginning of the parsha, "And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham fathered Yitzchak". We see from the beginning of the pasuk that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham. Why does the pasuk say later "Avraham fathered Yitzchak"? It seems obvious that if Yitzchak was the son of Avraham then Avraham fathered him.

Rashi cites the Midrash that explains that the deprecators of the generation were gossiping that Sarah, Avraham's wife, had been barren for over 50 years and after one night with Avimelech she conceived. Evidently, Avimelech was Yitzchak's father and not Avraham. In order to counter such claims, Hashem made Yitzchak's face almost identical to Avraham. Because of this similarity between Avraham and Yitzchak, the world attested to the fact that Avraham was indeed Yitzchak's father regardless of the situation with Avimelech.

We know that the pedigree of a Jew is sacred. We also know that Sarah was a tzaddekis and her power of prophecy was even greater than Avraham. How could Hashem allow her to be sequestered with a heathen such as Avimelech? How could Hashem have allowed there to be a question about Yitzchak's pedigree? In order to mitigate the damage caused by the questions arising from Yitzchak's pedigree, Hashem caused Yitzchak's face to be identical to that of Avraham in order to be a confirmation of his true pedigree. How can we understand this situation?

The purpose of existence is to enable man to make choices. Every moment is a choice between right and wrong due to a lack of complete clarity. If we make the right choices we succeed and if not we fail. Avraham was the role model of all existence. When *Avram* became *Avraham* he became the father of all the nations. He was a man that introduced monotheism into existence. Avraham was not only one of the most wealthy individuals in the world he was also the most spiritual. Avraham radiated with holiness and his very presence minimized one's ability to choose. How could a person choose to do wrong after being exposed to Avraham's level of spiritual clarity? For this reason, we know that throughout existence there is always a balance of good and evil. Who is the counterbalance to Avraham? Nimrod (who threw Avraham into the kiln of Kasdim) was the antithesis of Avraham. In fact, the Chazal tell us that the day that Nimrod was killed by Esav, Avraham passed away. We see that there cannot be a day where there is no counterbalance.



Avraham's successor was Yitzchak. He was the son of the father of all nations. In addition, he resembled Avraham. In a way they are both equated. If this is the case then how is Yitzchak's level of holiness counterbalanced in the world? How could there be free choice if there is no counterbalance? Therefore Hashem created a situation where people would question Yitzchak's pedigree. Is he the son of Avimelech (the heathen, murderer, and adulterer) or is he the son of Avraham? A woman who is barren for over 50 years conceived after one night with Avimelech – it must be the case that he is the father and not Avraham. Hashem performed a miracle in order to confirm Yitzchak's true pedigree. Because of the conflicting evidence, Yitzchak's level is diminished due to the fact that people would question his pedigree. It is through this conflict of evidence that Hashem is able to preserve the power of choice in the world. Despite the resemblance to Avraham, people could still choose to see the situation incorrectly and question. Yitzchak's ability to affect the world was no longer at Avraham's level because of this ambiguity.

We see that the counterbalance of good and evil is repeated clearly with Yaakov and Esav. This is the conflict between the Jews and Amalek. Hashem says that his throne will not complete until Amalek is obliterated from the face of the earth. Amalek is the thorn in the side of all existence since it epitomizes evil which undermines all the good of existence. Chazal explain to us that Amalek's attack on the B'nai Yisroel as they left Egypt was analogous to someone jumping into a scalding bath. Though the first person to jump into the bath will get burned, he will make the bath cooler for everyone else to dive in. All the nations of the world stood in awe of Klal Yisroel because they knew that the Jews had defeated the Egyptians who were the mightiest nation. Nevertheless, Amalek attacked the Jews thus diminishing our appearance of invincibility. We see again the counterbalance and the ambiguity in perceiving the world. It is through this ambiguity that free choice is maintained in the world. If we are able to choose the right path then our reward will be of the highest degree in the face of ambiguous options.

2. The Center of Creation

We read at the beginning of the parsha, "And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham – Avraham fathered Yitzchak". We discussed above one understanding of this pasuk. Rashi cites another interpretation of "Avraham fathered Yitzchak". He says that only after Hashem changed Avram's name to Avraham could he father Yitzchak. Does the Torah need to use four additional words simply to communicate that it was *Avraham* and not *Avram* that fathered Yitzchak? What do we learn from this?

We need to understand the difference between *Avram* and *Avraham*. According to Chazal, Avram was a great astrologer and that he was able to interpret the stars that informed him "Avram will not father a son, but Avraham will". But there must be a deeper meaning besides a simple name change that prompted the Torah to use four additional words

at the end of the first pasuk of Toldos. When Avraham was concerned that Eliezer may become his heir, Hashem told Avraham that he should look to the heavens and see that, as the stars cannot be counted, so too will be his progeny. The *Yalkut* notes that there is an extra letter “hey” at the end of *hashamayimah* when Hashem instructs Avraham to look to the heavens. The word for heaven should have been spelled *hashamayim* without the “hey” at the end.

Hashem tells Avraham that he created this world with the letter “hey”. We also find in the Gemara that there is a pasuk in *Tehilim* that Dovid Ha'Melech states that with the letters of “yud” and “hey”, Hashem created the worlds. With the power of the letter “yud”, Hashem created the spiritual world and with the “hey” He created the physical world.

Hashem explained to Avraham that just as the letter “hey” was needed to form all of existence, so too would he, in order to become the Father of the Jewish people, require a letter “hey” in his name. The letter “hey”, which created the entire world, caused Avram to become a new dimension of person in the world who was equivalent to all existence. This is also the meaning of the additional “hey” in the word *hashamayimah*. With this, we can also understand the Mishna that states that saving a single Jewish life is equivalent to saving the entire world. Because the same energy force (influence) was needed to create the world as was used by Hashem to bring about the Jewish people through *Avraham*.

Chazal explain that at the word found regarding creation - *biheebbar'am-* (When He created them) contains the same letters as *Avraham*. The Maharal explains that when Avraham came into existence he was not a continuation of his previous existence but rather the beginning of a new existence. We see that the Jewish people descend from a person who was the beginning of a completely new dimension of creation.

With this the Maharal explains that when the Torah tells us that Terach (Avram's father) died, he in fact lived for many more years. If this is the case then why did the Torah tell us that Terach died? Rashi cites the Chazal and explains that Avraham, leaving his father, would be seen as disrespectful since he would be violating his obligation to honor his father. Hashem said to Avraham that he was absolved from honoring Terach. On this the Maharal asks if in fact Terach was Avraham's father, how could he be absolved from his obligation? The answer is that Terach was no longer Avraham's father. Avraham was a new dimension of person who had no relevance to Terach. This is why the Torah states “Avraham fathered Yitzchak”. Avraham was only able to father the future patriarch, Yitzchak, only after becoming a dimension of person who is equivalent to all existence.

This is the pedigree of every Jew. If we could only appreciate our own level and dimension, then we would be able to experience great spiritual growth.

3. We Forge Our Own Path

The Torah tells us that Esav returned from the field after killing Nimrod (as well as committing four other cardinal sins on that day) and found Yakov cooking lentils with his face covered with ash. Esav asked Yakov, "What happened?" and Yakov responded, "Our grandfather passed away". After hearing this, Esav proclaimed that there is no judgment and no judge! By this, Esav denied the existence of G-d. Esav knew that his grandfather would inevitably pass away, as all people do. In addition Avraham had already lived 175 years. What caused Esav to have such an extreme reaction?

Chazal teach us that each of the Patriarchs was destined to live 180 years. Yitzchak lived 180 years. Yakov was supposed to live 180 years; however, he passed away after 147 years because Hashem deducted a year of his life for every word of complaint he gave to Pharaoh. Chazal teach us that Avraham was destined to live 180 years; however, Hashem deducted five years because He promised Avraham that he would pass away in a "good old age". If Avraham were to witness the day that Esav committed five cardinal sins, it would have undermined Hashem's promise of passing away in a "good old age" because Avraham would have been devastated to see his grandson following a path of evil.

Esav understood that his grandfather was supposed to live 180 years. After Avraham passed away at the age of 175, Esav questioned the justice of Hashem. If there were justice and a judge in existence how could Avraham be denied five years of his life? It is important for us to understand the situation.

On the day that Avraham passed away, Esav had killed Nimrod. The Midrash tells us that Nimrod possessed the special garments of Adam that were fabricated by Hashem. These garments had a special power of attracting animals and since Esav was a hunter, he desired to take these garments for himself. Esav killed Nimrod for the sake of these garments. As we learned earlier, there cannot be an Avraham in existence without a Nimrod- every force requires a counter force. Hashem maintains a perfect balance of good and evil in order to protect free choice. Ironically, we see that Esav's killing of Nimrod directly caused the passing away of Avraham. Esav was a cause of his grandfather's death because he chose to become a heretic on that day and commit five cardinal sins, one of which was murder. Hashem had promised Avraham that he would pass away in a "good old age." Therefore Hashem needed to deduct five years from Avraham's life so as he should not see his grandson committing these sins.

The irony is intensified because Esav denounced G-d because he believed his grandfather died prematurely when in fact Esav was the cause of Avraham losing five years from his life. Esav literally digs his own pit, jumps in and blames G-d for being in the pit. We can learn a lesson about ourselves through this incident.

People often do not understand their lives and circumstances. Some may believe that life is not fair because they deserve or do not deserve a certain set of outcomes. We make many choices in our lives often without clarity and our circumstances are a direct result of our choices. The source of our problems really lies in us. If we are able to have clarity, then we would be able to understand our circumstances. Our free choice dictates the way Hashem will treat us just as Esav's free choice resulted in the passing of Avraham. Let us not lose sight of these facts and hope to have clarity so as not to question the unwavering truth of Hashem's justice.

4. The Hidden Character of Yitzchak

Unlike Avraham whose life and character is well chronicled by the Torah, we find that the Torah does not provide us with this level of detail about Yitzchak's life. Yitzchak remains a unknown individual who is presented by the Torah as the object of the *Akeidah*. The Torah does not tell us if Yitzchak was in agreement with the *Akeidah* or if he was forced to participate. We are told however that Yitzchak is deceived by his son and misled by Yakov in order to receive the blessing of the birthright which was intended for Esav. The Torah conceals the true nature of Yitzchak. Chazal refer to Yitzchak as the *olah temima* "the unblemished offering". Yitzchak is also referred to as the *kodshi kadoshin* "the holy of holies". The Torah however does not explicitly reveal Yitzchak and his many qualities.

Yitzchak's eyesight was impaired in his old age. The Torah states clearly that Rivka understood Esav's character yet she did not reveal this knowledge to Yitzchak. It would seem that she should have told her husband about Esav. Why did Rivka choose to conceal this information not to do this? Another question arises - how did Rivka know Esav better than Yitzchak? How did she gain this special insight and not Yitzchak?

The Torah refers to Esav as a person with the greatest power of deception. He was able to have the appearance of Torah sage while at the same time being evil to the core. One may posit that Rivka understood Esav from her personal experience with her brother who was also a deceptive and deceitful person. The Torah however explains that Rivka gained this understanding of Esav's character in a specific manner. When Rivka was pregnant with Yakov and Esav she had great difficulty with her pregnancy. Rivka experienced painful jolting and movements within her womb that caused her to seek out Hashem. The Torah tells us that she went to Shem for clarification. He informed her that in her womb were two great nations – one that epitomizes holiness and the other evil. When Esav was born she understood that Esav epitomized evil and that he would readily deceive her as well as Yitzchak. She knew this because Shem explicitly told it to her. The question is why did she ask Shem? We know that Avraham and Yitzchak were greater prophets than Shem; yet, she received the prophecy from Shem.

The fact is Rivka had gone first to Avraham and Yitzchak concerning her difficult pregnancy but neither had any understanding of her predicament. If Hashem revealed this prophecy to Shem and not to Avraham or Yitzchak evidently He did not want them to know Esav's true nature. From this, Rivka understood that Hashem wanted to conceal this truth from Avraham and Yitzchak. We learned earlier that Hashem promised that Avraham would pass away in "a good old age" without being exposed to the realization of Esav's evil nature. This is why Hashem did not reveal this to Avraham. Hashem needed to keep Esav's nature hidden from Yitzchak because he would have been cursed by Yitzchak and not considered for the blessings. Rivka understood that she was not permitted this to communicate this knowledge to Avraham or Yitzchak because Hashem wished to conceal this from them.

The Ohr Ha' Chaim explains to us that the Torah reveals Yitzchak's character through one Hebrew letter. This week's parsha begins with *V'Aiele toldos Yitzchak v'Avraham* "And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham..." The Torah could have omitted the letter *vav* in the beginning of the pasuk. However, the Torah is telling us through this *vav*, which is a connecting letter, that Yitzchak was the equivalent of his father Avraham. Just as Avraham's life and character was explicitly outlined in the Torah, Yitzchak is a continuation of Avraham. The question to ask is, if the Torah reveals Avraham in detail why would it not depict Yitzchak?

The answer is that we can all understand the characteristic of *chesed* "kindness" which was personified through Avraham. Yitzchak however represented the attribute of *din* or "judgement". He was completely dedicated to self-perfection. He was the "unblemished offering". How could we even begin to understand or conceptualize someone at this level? It would be similar to attempting to understand an angel, which is impossible to comprehend, through textual description. The Torah therefore simply states *V'Aiele*- he was equivalent to Avraham. Even though Yitzchak's focus was the attribute of "judgment" while Avraham was "kindness", they were equivalent of one another. Since we could not be able to comprehend Yitzchak's characteristic, the Torah only alludes to his status through the letter *vav*.