

Parshas Toldos

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1. Avraham - the Patriarch of the Jewish People

The Torah states, **“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham - Avraham fathered Yitzchak....”** If the Torah identifies Yitzchak as the son of Avraham, then why is it necessary for it to reiterate that Avraham fathered Yitzchak? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that although the Torah states that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham, it was necessary for the Torah to inform us, for the sake of emphasis, that it was only “Avraham” (and not Avram) who was able to father Yitzchak. Meaning it was only after G’d had changed his name to Avraham by adding the letter “hay” that he fathered Yitzchak, the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. The Torah had previously informed us that after Avram became Avraham and Sarai became Sarah they would have a son. Why is it necessary to reiterate “Avraham fathered Yitzchak?”

The Midrash tells us that the transformation and metamorphosis that had taken place within Avraham to be able to father a child only happened after he had the letter “hay” added to his name. It was not merely a name change which allowed this event to take place.

The Midrash tells us that the spiritual energy contained within the letter “hay” which brought about all physical existence had to be invested into Avraham. This was essential for bringing about the necessary change for him to father the future Patriarch of the Jewish people. The “hay” brought about a profound change within him which caused his dimension of person to become the equivalent of all existence. As Avram, he was not the person to be the Patriarch to father the Jewish people. Avraham, on the other hand, was a new dimension of being. By reiterating “Avraham fathered Yitzchak” this is what the Torah is telling us. Consequently, Yitzchak, his son, was also of a special dimension. He was the first child of this kind to be born into existence.

The Torah tells us that when Avraham instructed Eliezer to seek out a wife for Yitzchak he made him take an oath to guarantee that he would not deviate from the criteria that he had set forth. At the time of the oath Eliezer was asked to place his hand under Avraham’s thigh. Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when one takes an oath one must take hold of a “mitzvah object” – such as a Torah scroll, Tefillin, or Mezuzah. In this case, the object of mitzvah was the location of Avraham’s circumcision. Rashi offers two explanations: Firstly, Avraham chose circumcision because it was the first mitzvah that was given to him. Secondly, it was a mitzvah that came to him with pain and therefore considered special.

It is interesting to note that Avraham was not able to father Yitzchak until he was circumcised; this occurred at the time when Hashem added the letter “hay” to his name and he was thus transformed.

The purpose of Eliezer’s mission was to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak who would be the Matriarch of the Jewish people. Through his circumcision, Avraham became qualified to be that new dimension of person. Because of his newly assumed level of spirituality, he alone could have a covenant with G’d and thus father the future Patriarch. Avraham made Eliezer put his hand under his thigh when he took the oath to

communicate that it was not a question of finding a wife, but rather, it was finding a woman who would complement this dimension of being as the Matriarch.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that a blessing that does not contain the name of G'd and the reference of "*Melech- King*" is not considered a blessing. The Gemara asks, "If this is the case, then why is the first blessing of the Amidah (silent prayer) considered a blessing since it does not refer to Hashem as "*Melech-King*?" The Gemara answers, "Since in the first blessing, G'd is referred to as "*Elokei Avraham – G'd of Avraham,*" it is the equivalent of identifying Him as "*Melech – King.*" Thus, the blessing has value. Seemingly, the understanding is that since Avraham is the individual who re-introduced G'd to the world as the "*Omnipotent Being,*" when one says "*Elokei Avraham*" it is the equivalent of saying "*G'd is Melech.*"

The Daas Zikeinim u' Baalei Tosafos (group of earlier commentators) explain that Avraham had referred to G'd as "*Elokei HaShamayim – G'd of the Heavens.*" Chazal tell us that initially when Avraham began espousing monotheism, G'd was only "*Elokei HaShamayim.*" G'd was unknown to mankind. Thus, He was not perceived as "*Elokei Ha' Aretz- G'd of the world.*" Since the first blessing of the Amidah is identified as "*the Blessing of Avraham,*" the word "*Melech*" is omitted to indicate that Hashem's Presence was not known.

Seemingly the explanation of the Daas Zikeinim u' Baalei Tosafos is difficult because the first blessing of the Amidah also mentions "*the G'd of Yitzchak and the G'd of Yaakov.*" During their lifetime G'd was known as "*Melech Ha' Aretz - King of the world.*"

Although Elokei Yitzchak and Elokei Yaakov are also mentioned in the first blessing of the Amidah, we conclude it with "*Magen Avraham – shield of Avraham.*" Ramchal in his work Derech Hashem (the Way of G'd), explains that Avraham was the root and the foundation of the spiritual structure of the Jewish people. Meaning, the evolution of the Jewish people until the end of time is determined by the infrastructure that was set forth by Avraham our Patriarch. Yitzchak's and Yaakov's spiritual development and impact on existence are only an extension of that structure which was established by Avraham – the founding Patriarch. Thus, we conclude with "*Magen Avraham*" because, in essence, they are only an expression of what Avraham had initially set forth. The potential of the Jewish people is rooted in "*Avraham,*" who was the Patriarch and who embodied all of existence. Yitzchak's and Yaakov's spiritual state only emanated from a root source, "*Avraham.*" This established itself at a time that G'd had not yet been proclaimed as "*Melech - King.*" Thus, we are able to understand the words of the Daas Zikeinim u' Baalei Tosafos.

2. The Linkage between Avraham Our Patriarch and Yaakov

The Midrash Tanchumah cites a verse from Mishlei (Proverbs), "The crown of the elders is the sons of their sons (grandchildren) and the glory of the children is their forefathers." The Midrash explains, "The righteous pride themselves and are beautified through their grandchildren and the grandchildren through their grandparents." Avraham was cast into the fiery Kiln of Kasdim and emerged unharmed; however, when his brother Haran was cast into the Kiln he perished in the fire. Why did Avraham merit the miracle and his brother Haran did not?

When Avraham chose to go into the kiln and not bow to the idol, he chose to give his life for the sanctification of G'd's Name. However, Haran, his brother, who waited to

see the outcome of Avraham's sacrifice, chose to go into the fire only if Avraham came out alive. Thus, Haran's entering into the fire was not for the sake of dying and sanctifying G'd's Name. Therefore Haran did not merit a miracle.

There is a Midrash which is cited which seems to have a different explanation. The Midrash cites a verse which states, "the House of Yaakov redeemed Avraham." Meaning, because Avraham, our Patriarch, needed to come into existence to father the Jewish people, (which ultimately would receive the Torah at Sinai), he did not perish in the fire. Conversely, although it is not stated by Chazal, Haran whose purpose was not to father special progeny, perished in the fire. However, when one reads the text of the Midrash Tanchumah, one sees that this is not a correct interpretation.

Avraham in his own right, as we explained, merited to be saved from the kiln because he was willing to die to sanctify the Name of G'd. Nevertheless, the Midrash tells us that the merit of the House of Yaakov was needed because there was a prosecution against Avraham.

The Midrash states, "Avraham was "cloaked" in the merit of Yaakov. When Nimrod cast Avraham into the kiln, Hashem came to save him. At that time the angels in heaven asked G'd, "How could you save this individual? How many rashaim (evil people) will descend from him?" Hashem answered the angels, "The reason I am saving Avraham is because of his grandson Yaakov." The Midrash cites the verse "It was the House of Yaakov redeemed Avraham..."

Based on Avraham's own merit he deserved to be saved from the kiln; however, because of the issue that was raised by the angels, his survival was in question. They had mentioned that the reason he does not deserve to live is because of the evil people that would descend from him. Seemingly this reference was to Yishmael and Esav, who were also the descendents of Avraham. Esav was the father of the Edomites and the forbearer of the Amalekites, who were the personification of evil. As it is stated in the Book of Shemos, "My (G'd) throne will not be complete until Amalek is obliterated from existence." Thus, by sparing Avraham from death, G'd's own Glory was being undermined.

G'd responded to the angels that the "Bais Yaakov- the house of Yaakov (the Jewish people) is a counter balance to this point. Despite the desecration of G'd's Name that would come about through the Amalekites and Edom, the Jewish people themselves will counter their influence through the study of the Torah and the fulfillment of its mitzvos. The sanctification of G'd's Name that will emanate from the Jewish people will negate and ultimately nullify this evil. Consequently, Avraham was saved. However, the basis for the miracle was not G'd's response to the angels, but rather his own worthiness. This is meant by the verse of Mishlei, "The crown of the elders is their grandchildren..."

What is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, "The glory of the children is their forefathers"? When Yaakov left the home of Lavan after 20 years he was pursued by his father-in-law to be killed. Eventually when Lavan caught up with Yaakov he said to him, "If it were not for the merit of my forefather Avraham and the merit of my father Yitzchak, I would have not survived..." This is how the children are glorified through their forefathers.

In order to be protected, succeed and advance one must have personal merit and draw from the merit of those who will descend from him as well as those who preceded him. Each is a glorification of the other.

3. *Quantifying Our Patriarch Yitzchak*

The Midrash states, “Reb Shimon bar Yochai says, “Hashem does not associate His name with tzaddikim (devoutly righteous) during their lifetime. It is only after their passing does He associate His Name with them. As it is stated in the verse, “The Kadoshim (holy people) that are in the ground...” Meaning, G’d does not classify them as “Kadoshim” until they are buried in the earth. As long as they are alive, He does not associate His Name with them because G’d is concerned that because they are susceptible to their evil inclination they may fail. However, after their passing G’d identifies Himself with them.” The Midrash continues, “Reb Shimon bar Yochai asks, “But we find that Hashem associated His Name with Yitzchak while he was alive. As it is stated in the verse when G’d communicated a prophecy to Yaakov He had said, “Elokei Avraham Avicha v’Elokei Yitzchak- G’d of Avraham your father and G’d of Yitzchak (Avraham had already passed away, however Yitzchak was alive).”

The Rabbis explain that the reason G’d associated his Name with Yitzchak during his lifetime is because, “Hashem sees Yitzchak as the heap of ash piled on the altar (of the Akeidah).” Thus, because he is not regarded as a physical being, he is no longer subject to the evil inclination. As G’d had commanded him, Avraham had taken Yitzchak, his beloved son, to Mt. Moriah to be bound and slaughtered as an offering. Despite the difficulty of this test, Avraham succeeded and was able to carry out the Will of Hashem. He bound Yitzchak and took the knife with full intent to slaughter him as an offering; however, an angel called out from heaven and commanded him not to even inflict any wound on his son. In order for Avraham to actualize the intent of the Akeidah, which was the pinnacle of his spiritual success, a ram miraculously presented itself to be slaughtered in the place of Yitzchak. When Avraham carried out all of the rituals associated with the slaughtering of the ram and offered it as a burnt offering, he did so with the intent that what he had done to it was what he would have done to his own son Yitzchak. Thus, G’d valued every aspect of the ritual of the ram as if it were indeed Yitzchak being offered—despite the fact that he continued to live.

The Portion begins, “And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham...” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks that the Portion could have simply begun, “These are the offspring of Yitzchak...” What is the significance of the letter “vav (and)” at the beginning of the verse? The function of the letter “vav (and)” is to connect and equate something that precedes it with something that is to follow. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Torah does not offer much description of Yitzchak or his spiritual endeavors. It only tells us that he was the one taken by his father at the Akeidah. If the Torah does not explicitly describe the special spiritual dimension of Yitzchak, then where does it allude to his unique level? The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh answers that the purpose of the letter “vav (and)” at the beginning of the Portion is to associate Yitzchak’s being with that of his father Avraham, who the Torah describes in detail. Just as Avraham was the exceptional spiritual person, so too is his son Yitzchak.

Just as the Torah describes and provides us with the appreciation to understand the spiritual dimension of Avraham by presenting us with the details of his life, why does the Torah not do the same with Yitzchak? In terms of identifying who Yitzchak truly was it is not possible to do so through some level of depiction. His essence assumed a consecrated status – which is not able to be understood or appreciated. Yitzchak was the equivalent of a living angel. As we see from the Midrash, although he was a fully functioning, living, person, Yitzchak was the equivalent of the heap of ash on the altar. This alludes to his dimension as a spiritual being - no longer human. Just as it is not possible to quantify an angel, so too it is not possible to attempt to describe Yitzchak. However, the Torah does

tell us who he was through the letter “vav,” which identifies him as equivalent to his father Avraham. Beyond that association, we do not have the capacity to relate to the dimension of Yitzchak’s being.

G’d associated His Name with Yitzchak during his lifetime because he was no longer viewed in the realm of the physical; but rather, he was spiritual. Thus, he had no relevance to the evil inclination. When Hashem associates His Name with Yitzchak our Patriarch (Elokei Yitzchak) it is communicating to us that his dimension of person was no longer as one who is subject to physical influences. His essence is seen by G’d as the ultimate offering which silences the prosecution of satan against the Jewish people on Rosh Hashanah until the end of time.

4. Being Responsible for Others

The Torah tells us that when there was a famine in Canaan, Yitzchak wanted to leave to go to Egypt as his father Avraham had done so during the time of famine. However G’d told Yitzchak not to leave Canaan. The Torah states, **“Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall indicate to you...I will bless you; for to you and your offspring will I give all these lands...I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens...and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring. Because Avraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My Torahs.”** Yitzchak himself was one of the Patriarchs of the Jewish people and was the equivalent of an angel. He was viewed by G’d as an unblemished burnt offering. One would think that because of Yitzchak’s caliber of spirituality that the blessing bestowed upon him was due to his own merit. However, G’d informs him that all the blessing that he will receive is only because of Avraham his father.

Sforno explains, “Avraham was always considered special to G’d because he invested his life in chesed (loving kindness). As it is stated, “What are the ways of Hashem? Kindness and Truth and to advise sinners to walk the proper path.” Avraham brought this about through his espousing G’d’s existence in the world. As it is stated, “and he called in the Name of Hashem (outreach).” He was a paradigm to the world of what G’d wanted a human being to be. Yitzchak’s worthiness at this moment was unrelated to his own accomplishment. As the verse states, “...Because Avraham obeyed My voice...” However after Yitzchak himself called out in the Name of Hashem (as Avraham had done), which is the ultimate chesed (kindness) to others, he became worthy in his own right. As we see that initially there was a dispute between Yitzchak and the Gerar community regarding the wells that had been dug by Avraham. It was only after he began espousing G’d’s Presence in the world that the dispute resolved. Yaakov on the other hand, who continuously engaged in study of Torah and its dissemination to others (making G’d’s existence known to the world), was deserving of the blessing of Avraham due to his own merit.

The Torah tells us that Noach fathered three sons at the age of 500. Sforno explains that although during the generations of Noach people began fathering children at an earlier age, he was not able to father children until he was 500 years old. It was only after he began building the Ark which was meant to be a tool to espouse monotheism/ G’d’s existence to the world that he merited to have children. Similarly Yitzchak was worthy in his own right and his predicament (regarding the Gerar community) was resolved after he began to call out in the Name of G’d.

We are able to learn from Noach and Yitzchak, our Patriarch, that it was only after

they personally assumed responsibility for their fellow, in a spiritual sense, that they merited personal worthiness. When one is concerned about another's spirituality and thus dedicates himself to make G'd's Presence known, then Hashem will protect and bring blessing to that individual. However, if one's focus is inwardly directed, even though it is regarding personal spiritual growth, he does not merit special divine assistance, which is needed to overcome many barriers.

The situation of Jewish assimilation has reached catastrophic proportions. Jews are vanishing from existence because of this spiritual plague that has befallen us. We are experiencing literally a spiritual holocaust. Do we take time out to contemplate how to affect and influence our fellow Jew to appreciate his own Judaism? Do we maintain a consciousness of opportunity, regarding other Jews in the workplace, to be the role model or influence that may impact upon their spirituality? Or are we simply satisfied with our own situation and thus feel it is inappropriate to cross the line and bring spirituality into the workplace.

One must understand that the only reason one merits blessing and success is because Hashem deems it so. If he feels the responsibility to do G'd's bidding, then he will merit G'd's Assistance on every level. However, if one is self-occupied with his own aspirations, although they may be spiritual, then he may be on his own.

5. The Methodology to Experience and Perceive Something Properly (from *Chayei Sarah*)

The Torah states, **“Lavan and Besuel said (to Eliezer) ‘...Here, Rivka is before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master’s son as Hashem has spoken.’ And it was, when Avraham’s servant (Eliezer) heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto Hashem.”** Rashi cites the Midrash that explains, “From here we learn that one gives thanks for good tidings.” The words of the Midrash are seemingly difficult to understand. The Torah only informs us how to behave and react when we do not know how to do so otherwise. It is obvious that when one hears or receives good tidings one must give thanks. When one receives something of great value it is natural to give thanks. Nevertheless, Chazal tell us that it is only from Eliezer's behavior of prostrating himself that we learn to give thanks for good tidings. How do we understand this?

If one truly appreciates that he has received something of value, then it is not possible for him to forego giving thanks. The Torah is teaching us that Eliezer's prostration was not a natural expression of his appreciation of the good tidings. If this would be the natural response of every individual, the Torah would not need to communicate this to us. Why was Eliezer's action not considered a natural expression of his appreciation?

The Torah tells us that Eliezer prostrated himself on the ground upon hearing the good tidings that Rivka's family would allow her to become the wife of Yitzchak, the future Matriarch of the Jewish people. Prostration is an action that is indicative of total self-negation. When the children of Chais agreed to sell a burial plot for Sarah, our Matriarch, Avraham prostrated himself before them. He communicated to them through his action that since they had provided him with this exceptional kindness, he was

selflessly dedicated to them. In order for one to be able to fully appreciate and be beholden to another, he must negate himself and remove any sense of entitlement. If there is any degree of feeling entitled, it will minimize the appreciation of the other. By not feeling entitled, he will fully appreciate and understand that he is the beneficiary of good.

It is interesting to note that personally Eliezer was not the beneficiary of the kindness. Because Eliezer had located a woman qualified to be the Matriarch. Avraham, his master, was the true beneficiary. Therefore he had to perform an external act of prostration to negate his personal feelings to fully appreciate the good that was taking place.

Eliezer revered his master Avraham. His master had selflessly sacrificed himself and even his only beloved son Yitzchak to do the Will of Hashem. With this in mind, it is possible that Eliezer would have thought that his master was entitled to the good fortune of Rivka's family acquiescing to his request. If Eliezer had felt that his master was entitled, he could not have experienced that special level of thankfulness. Thus, Eliezer prostrated himself in order to bring himself to a level of negation where even his perception of reality had no value (that his master was entitled). We are able to learn from Eliezer's behavior that he needed to perform an external action in order to evoke within himself the desired result. This is what the Torah is teaching us.

Ramchal in his work Mesillas Yesharim (Path of the Just) writes that if one cannot experience certain feelings naturally that he should resort to performing external actions that will arouse within himself the proper feelings. The Ramah in Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) writes that the basis for a Jew to sway while praying is derived from a verse in Tehillim (Psalms), "All my bones proclaim- G'd who is as great as You?" Thus, the swaying action demonstrates being consumed with declaring that Hashem is everything.

The Shulchan Aruch states that on Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment) one should pray in a bowed state during the Amidah (Silent Prayer), which is not one's normal stance for tefillah (prayer). Meaning, since it is essential for one to feel humbled before G'd, the bowed posture will evoke that sense of humility.

Every day we say many things during our prayers; however, do we truly "feel" what we articulate? The only way one can experience the proper feeling is to reflect upon what one is saying and perform some external act that will arouse those feelings. Reb Yisroel Salanter z'tl had a unique understanding of the essence of the human being. His approach to appreciating concepts and values was through continuous verbal repetition of verses or statements said aloud with feeling, which created "*hispaalus* – to be overtaken and impacted."

The Chofetz Chaim had once stayed in the same inn as Reb Yisroel. They had adjoining rooms. Throughout the night the Chofetz Chaim had heard through the wall how Reb Yisroel continuously paced back and forth throughout the entire night repeating aloud the verse, "One must serve G'd with joy." What was the value of this behavior? By doing an external action as Reb Yisroel had, one can come to fully appreciate and internalize what he is saying. Our service of G'd is contingent on our level of appreciation for His kindness. Therefore we must resort to actions and modes of behavior that will evoke the proper feelings to be appreciative.