

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES**

*Parshas Toldos*

December 2, 2005

**Mazal Tov From the Yad Avraham to**

**The  
Davis Family**

**On the Engagement of**

**Michael Davis to Aliza Fessel**

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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## Parshas Toldos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. The Destructiveness of Distraction

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 it is obvious that Avraham had fathered Yitzchak. Why then is it necessary for the Torah to reiterate this point? Rashi cites Chazal who state, “It is because the scoffers of the generation had said, ‘Seemingly Avraham had not fathered Yitzchak. Sarah had been married to him for many years and remained childless. However, after spending only one night with Avimelech she conceived. This would indicate that Avraham is not the father of Yitzchak.’” Therefore, G’d performed a miracle that Yitzchak should have the identical facial feature of his father Avraham so that all should attest to the fact that Avraham had fathered Yitzchak.

On a simple level, one would say that this miracle was performed in order to dispel the claim that was made by the scoffers because the pedigree of the Jewish people was in question. Since the special status of the Jewish people is rooted in their spiritual genealogy, which is the holy Patriarchs, it would severely diminish them if the world believed that Yitzchak’s pedigree was that of the Philistine king Avimelech.

The nations of the world question many fundamental issues, which are critical to the essence of the Jewish people. For example, they question the authenticity of Torah and Jews being the “chosen people.” Despite the fact that revealed miracles have been performed on their behalf, the misperception of the world has not changed regarding the Jewish people. Evidently, the miracle that was performed that Yitzchak should resemble his father was not to impress the world with his special pedigree.

The Midrash continues, “See how great it is to have shalom (peace/completeness). When Sarah had been taken by Avimelech and Pharaoh and conceived immediately, the nations of the world had said, ‘Is it

possible that at the age of 100 years that Avraham fathered a child? Rather Sarah conceived from either Avimelech or Pharaoh. Within his heart, Avraham was concerned about what the world would say regarding the conception and birth of Yitzchak. Therefore, G’d commanded the angel that was responsible for developing Yitzchak *in utero* to develop his facial features to be identical to that of his father Avraham. Thus, the whole world would then attest that Avraham fathered Yitzchak.”

We see from the Midrash that G’d performed the miracle not in order to impact upon the world’s perception, but rather to address Avraham’s personal concern. Avraham did not have peace within himself because of his concern that the world would say that he had not fathered Yitzchak. He believed that if the world had such a claim, his effectiveness in espousing monotheism would be greatly diminished because his successor (Yitzchak) would not be seen as his son. Thus, G’d performed a miracle in order to bring inner peace to Avraham. In addition, if Avraham would be lacking in his inner peace, it would be a distraction that would limit his capability to be fully functional.

If Avraham were disturbed and distracted to any degree his effectiveness in espousing monotheism to the world would be diminished. The consequences of Avraham not functioning optimally would have far-reaching and catastrophic results.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Deos that a Jew has a Torah obligation to maintain his health. It is impossible for one to serve G’d properly if one is distracted by physical pains and ailments. If the body is not healthy than the mind cannot be healthy. Therefore if one does not maintain his health he is being negligent regarding his responsibility to G’d.

We see again from Rambam that one must be completely at peace in order to serve G’d properly (not to be distracted). This is the reason G’d performed a miracle on behalf of Avraham. Man has a tendency, because of his inclinations, to be distracted. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos

states, "Who is the wealthy one? It is the one who is satisfied with his portion." Seemingly, the Mishna is communicating an insight in what makes a person content. However, according to our understanding, the Mishna is communicating something profound and fundamental to the service of G'd. One is not able to serve G'd properly unless he is satisfied/content with his portion because he would be distracted if he would not be content.

## ***2. Yitzchak's Unique Dimension as a Patriarch***

The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, "The father of the tzaddik (devoutly righteous) rejoices and the one who bears the chacham (wise person) will rejoice with him...To whom is King Solomon referring? Yitzchak is the special tzaddik who caused all to rejoice with his birth. Who rejoiced in the birth of Yitzchak? It was heaven and earth, the sun, moon, and stars that rejoiced in his birth. Why did existence rejoice? It is because if Yitzchak had not come into existence, creation would not have continued to exist. As the prophet Yirmiya states, 'If not for My covenant, which is in effect day and night, the extent of heaven and earth would not be put in place.' What is the covenant to which G'd is referring? It is Yitzchak – as it states in the Torah, 'My covenant I will establish with Yitzchak.'"

Why is existence only maintained because of Yitzchak? Why is it not maintained in the merit of the other Patriarchs - Avraham or Yaakov? Seemingly, existence should be maintained because of Yaakov who is referred to by Chazal as "the most special of the Patriarchs." He was the only one qualified to father the twelve tribes, which is the basis for the Jewish people. In addition, the Gemara interprets the words of Yirmiya, "If not for My covenant, which is in effect day and night, the extent of heaven and earth would be put in place" to be referring to the continuous study of Torah. If Torah were not studied day and night, existence would cease to be. Furthermore, Yaakov is quantified by the Torah as the Patriarch of Torah. As the verse states, "Yaakov is the perfect person who dwells in the tent (the tent of Torah)." One would think that the verse in Proverbs is referring to our Patriarch Yaakov. Nevertheless, the Midrash explains that it was the birth of Yitzchak that caused existence to rejoice. It is only with Yitzchak that G'd had established His covenant. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos cites and explains a verse from the prophet Yishaya, "(The Jewish people say to G'd) You are our Father. Avraham we do not

know and we do not recognize Yisroel (Yaakov)...'. To what is this verse referring? At the end of time, G'd will say to Avraham, 'Your children have sinned against Me.' Avraham responds, 'If they have sinned, they should be obliterated for the sake of Your Holy Name.' G'd then will approach Yaakov, 'Your children have sinned against Me.' One would think that perhaps since Yaakov had experienced difficulties in raising twelve sons he would have more compassion than Avraham. Nevertheless, Yaakov will respond, 'If they have sinned, they should be obliterated for the sake of Your Holy Name.'...G'd then will approach Yitzchak saying, 'Your children have sinned against Me.' Yitzchak will respond, "You refer to the Jewish people as 'my children' are they not Your children? When the Jewish people had declared at Sinai, 'Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen,' did You not call them 'My child, My first born.' Now that they have sinned, You refer to them as 'my children.' In addition, how much did they actually sin? Man lives 70 years. During the first 20 years of life, one has no culpability. Thus, there are only 50 years left for them to sin. One sleeps a total of 25 years in his life, and one does not sin in his sleep. Thus, there are only 25 years left to sin. Since some of one's day is occupied praying, eating, and tending to his bodily needs during which time he is not sinning. Thus, there are a total of twelve and a half years open to sin...If You wish to hold me personally culpable for the sins of the Jewish people then spare them... In addition, if You chose to obliterate me in their stead, did I not already give my life for You at the Akeidah? Therefore the account should be considered settled.' Thus, Yitzchak will be the only Patriarch at the end of time that will defend the Jewish people..."

Yitzchak was the only Patriarch who actually gave his life for Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G'd's Name) – at the Akeidah. After the Akeidah, Yitzchak is referred to as the "unblemished burnt offering." Yaakov our Patriarch was never in a situation in which he gave his life. Although Avraham had given his life to be thrown into the fiery kiln of Kasdim, it is not comparable to his son Yitzchak. When Avraham went into the kiln, he was considered a Noahide. Although he did perform the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem by going into the fire, he was not obligated to do so because sanctifying G'd's Name is not one of the seven Noachide laws. If one performs a mitzvah to which he is not obligated, it does not have the same value as one who performs a mitzvah that he is obligated to perform. Yitzchak was willing to give his life at the Akeidah after he was told by G'd – through his father Avraham who was a prophet, to do so. Thus, Yitzchak's willingness to die (which he was obligated to

do) is valued by G'd to a greater degree than Avraham's going into the kiln.

Yitzchak is the only Patriarch, that at the end of time, who will be qualified to take upon himself the spiritual debt that was generated by the sins of the Jewish people. It is only because of Yitzchak that the Jewish people will not be obliterated. If the Jewish people were to be destroyed then all existence would have no value/meaning/purpose. Therefore, all existence rejoiced with the birth of Yitzchak – because it is in his merit that the Jewish people will continue to exist. Consequently, it is because of Yitzchak that there is a value/purpose for existence.

### 3. *The Spiritual Interplay Between Children and Grandparents*

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. What is the application of this? Avraham was crowned with the merit of Yaakov. When Nimrod had thrown him into the kiln of Kasdim, G'd came to save Avraham. At that time the angels had protested saying, ‘Why are You saving him? How many *reshaim* (evil people) will descend from him? (Yishmael, Esav, Amalek). G'd responded, ‘I will save him in the merit of Yaakov his grandson’... As the verse states, ‘the House of Yaakov redeemed Avraham.’”

Based on Avraham's own merit, as the one who introduced G'd into existence, he deserved to be saved from the kiln; however, because of the issue that was raised by the angels, his survival should not have come about. The claim of the angels was that since the purpose of existence is only to bring about G'd's Glory and Avraham's survival from the kiln ultimately will bring about Chilul Hashem (desecration of G'd's Name) (through his descendents – Yishmael, Esav, Amalek). This is contrary to the objective of existence, therefore, he should not be spared.

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 their 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. The basis for Avraham's meriting the miracle was not G'd's response to the angels, but rather, it was his own worthiness.

It is interesting to note that if Avraham had not survived the kiln of Kasdim the world would have been denied his influence. He had dedicated his life to the espousal of G'd's existence. He had converted many pagans to monotheism. Avraham eventually merited being the location for the Divine Presence in the world. Nevertheless, if Avraham was not meant to have Yaakov/Jewish people descend from him, the accomplishments of his own life would not have been sufficient for him to be saved. The Chilul Hashem that would be perpetrated by Yishmael and Esav would have negated whatever Avraham had accomplished in his life.

What is the meaning of the conclusion of the verse, “The glory of the children is their forefathers”? When Yaakov left the home of his father-in-law, Lavan, without his knowledge, he was pursued by Lavan to be killed. Eventually when Lavan caught up with his son in law, Yaakov said to him, **‘If it were not for the G'd of my father, the G'd of Avraham and the dread of Yitzchak, which was for me...’** If it were not for the merit of Avraham, Yaakov and his children would have perished – despite the fact that they were the future of the Jewish people, which is the counter balance of evil that exists in the world. This is how the children are glorified through their forefathers.

From this, we can understand the blessing that G'd had given to Avraham when he was told to leave his homeland, his birthplace, and his father's home – **“And you will be a blessing.”** Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that although G'd is identified in the Amidah as the G'd of Avraham, the G'd of Yitzchak, and G'd of Yaakov, the first blessing will conclude only with Avraham (the Shield of Avraham). Simply, one could understand that the reason the blessing concludes with Avraham is only that had it not been for him, his own children would have not perceived and espoused G'd's Presence in existence. They had only advanced and expanded his mission. However, we see from the words of the Midrash that there is something more profound that is being communicated. Although Yaakov was considered the most special of the patriarchs, because he had established the foundation of the Jewish people (twelve tribes), nevertheless, had it not been for the merit of Avraham, he would have perished by the hand of Lavan. Thus, the blessing concludes with “G'd, the Shield of Avraham.” Avraham, our Patriarch, was not only the

founding father of the Jewish people, but also because of his merit, they were able to survive.

#### 4. *The Secret of Jewish Survival*

The Midrash cites a verse from Yishaya and explains, “All the vessels that will be developed to come upon you, will not succeed. All the nations that will stand up against you in judgment will be found guilty.” The Jewish people come before G’d and say, ‘Master of the Universe, see how the nations of the world enslave us. They have no other interest other than to plot together against us (to destroy us)...G’d says to the Jewish people, ‘What is the value of all of their plans and strategies? They may issue decrees (against you) but I annul and destroy them.’ As it states, ‘G’d is the protector against all those who oppress you.’ As we see: Pharaoh gave the command to destroy the Jewish males, but G’d did not give such an order. Rather than limiting our number, the Jewish people, although they were oppressed, they increased in number. Haman decreed that all the Jewish people should be destroyed, but G’d did not decree this. Therefore, what had transpired was the opposite – the Jews survived and Haman and his family were destroyed...Hadrian (Roman Emperor) had said to Reb Yehoshua ‘Great is the sheep (the Jewish people) who stand surrounded by seventy wolves (70 nations of the world.’ Reb Yehoshua responded, ‘Great is the Shepherd (G’d) who tends to His flock.’”

One could interpret the statement of Hadrian to mean that he was impressed by the tenacity of the Jewish people (sheep). Despite the fact that they are surrounded by the 70 nations of the world (wolves), who are continuously plotting to destroy them, they survive. As much as the nations try to destroy the Jew, they fail. Reb Yehoshua’s responded to Hadrian by explaining to him that the survival of the Jewish people was unrelated to themselves, but rather, G’d (the shepherd) is the One who has protected them. However, Eitz Yosef, the commentator on the Midrash, explains the words of Hadrian and Reb Yehoshua differently.

According to the Eitz Yosef interpretation, Hadrian was highlighting the hopelessness of the Jewish people – being surrounded by 70 wolves. It is not possible for a sheep to survive such a predicament. The only reason the Jewish people have survived is that the nations of the world have spared them – out of the goodness of their heart. The fact that the Jewish people survive and thrive is only due to the benevolence of the nations of the world. Reb Yehoshua responded by explaining to Hadrian that the kindness of the nations of the world is unrelated to the

survival of the Jewish people. Rather it is only G’d Himself (their shepherd) who protects and sustains them. It is because of G’d’s protection that “all the vessels that will come upon you (Jewish people) will not succeed.”

King David writes in Psalms, “Praise Hashem, all the nations; praise Him...For His kindness overwhelmed us (the Jewish people).” The Gemara asks, “Why would the nations of the world praise G’d for overwhelming the Jew with kindness?” Seemingly, the nations would praise G’d if they were the recipients of G’d’s Kindness. Reb Yehoshua Leib Diskin z’tl explains that the Jewish people are unaware of all of the plotting by the nations of the world against them. These plots of destruction are continuously foiled. As a result, the nations of the world are amazed about how every time they attempt to destroy the Jew something always interferes and disrupts their plan. They continuously see clearly that this is not attributed to happenstance but rather it is only because of the overwhelming kindness of G’d that comes upon the Jewish people. Thus, because of their recognition of G’d’s kindness for His flock, the nations of the world praise G’d.

If the Jew would only be aware of all of the designs and machinations of evil of the world against him and how, because of G’d’s love, they are continuously foiled, he would truly appreciate the fact that his existence and survival is solely due to the Kindness of G’d. Reb Yaakov Emdin writes in his siddur that the greatest revealed miracle of our day is the survival of the Jewish people. The fact that the Jewish people exist and thrive despite the millennia of persecution and destruction is truly a revealed miracle. It cannot be understood in any other context. The Jew himself needs to understand and appreciate that his special shepherd (G’d) who protects him, not only allows him to survive, but is also involved and is responsible for every aspect of his life. As the Midrash states, “If it is not decreed by G’d, it will not come to pass...” Therefore one must establish his spirituality as primary and all other concerns as secondary.

#### 5. *The Value of Adding*

The Torah states, “*Vayeitze Yitzchak lasuach basadeh- Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field...*” The Gemara explains that the term “*lasuach*” refers to tefillah (prayer). From here, it is derived that Yitzchak our Patriarch established the mincha prayer service (afternoon service). The Midrash states, “Why did Chazal legislate that one should pray three times a day? It is so that one should add to his tefillah (prayers)...” Even according to the position of Rambam who rules that tefillah is a Torah obligation, one needs only to pray once a day.

Nevertheless, Chazal legislated that one must pray three times a day (Shachris (Morning), Mincha (afternoon), Arvis (evening)).

The Midrash continues, “Not only does one need to add to his tefillah, he must add to his Torah.” Why does the Midrash need to state that one must add to his Torah? The verse explicitly states that one must be continuously engaged in Torah study day and night. In addition, it is interesting to note that the Midrash does not state that one needs to add to one’s “Torah study,” rather one must add to one’s “Torah.” Evidently, the Midrash is communicating something more than what is explicitly stated in the text regarding Torah study.

Why did Chazal feel that it was necessary to add to the base obligation of praying once a day? The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin states, “Why was man created as an individual being (without a counterpart as all other living creatures)? It is so that he should say, ‘For me the world was created.’” The statement of the Mishna can be understood in one of two ways – the correct way and the incorrect way. By recognizing that all creation was brought into existence to accommodate one single individual, one will understand the awesome responsibility that is incumbent upon him – that it was necessary to create an entire universe to accommodate his obligation. This is the correct understanding of why man was created as a single unit. However, the statement of the Mishna can be understood incorrectly – that the entire universe was created to accommodate man’s personal needs. If one believes that the world was created only to accommodate his physical needs/desires, then he will become self-centered and fully occupied with satisfying his own inclinations. He will feel that his success is attributed to his own ability.

In order to counter the natural tendency that exists within every human being to become self-absorbed, Chazal legislated that one must pray three times a day (Amidah). Every blessing within the Amidah is an acknowledgment that whatever one possesses is only due to G’d’s endowment. By standing before G’d and articulating that every aspect of his life (wisdom, health, material success, etc.) are only due to G’d’s Kindness, one will gain and retain the clarity to attribute all that he has to G’d. Although one may have a Torah obligation (Rambam) to pray once a day, Chazal needed to “add to prayer” to counter man’s inclination towards selfishness and arrogance. Thus, they enacted an additional two prayer services a day.

Regarding the Midrash’s statement that one must “add to Torah,” it is communicating that although there is an explicit obligation to engage in Torah study day and night (at every available moment), one must continuously strive to get a deeper understanding of Torah that he studies and reviews. One must come upon new horizons in his Torah study. When one comes upon a new depth of understanding of Torah it changes his dimension of being. Chasam Sofer z’tl had said, “There is not a day in my life that had passed that I did not come upon a new incite/novel concept in Torah.” It is cited that if one comes upon new understanding of Torah on Shabbos, it allows that person to assume a special dimension of spirituality.

The Torah, being the wisdom of G’d, has unlimited depth and breadth. There is nothing that is not contained within it. Regardless of how many times one studies the same subject matter, there are always new levels of understandings that one can come upon. When one comprehends the Torah on a more profound level, he activates special spiritual energies/influences that elevate himself and all existence.

With this understanding culled from the Midrash, we are able to explain the statement of Chazal, “The Torah must be seen continuously as something that is new – as if it were given today (as it was at Sinai).” Since one’s obligation is to reveal new levels, which he had not previously understood, it is the equivalent of coming upon the Torah for the first time.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that when Yehoshua was engaged in battle during the nighttime period an angel appeared to him with his sword drawn. This indicated to Yehoshua that he had sinned. Yehoshua had asked the angel, “Why have you come?” The angel responded, “I came to you because you should be engaged at this moment in something other than battle.” The angel was alluding to the fact that Yehoshua and the Jewish people should have been engaged in Torah study during the nighttime period rather than battle. The Gemara cites a verse that communicates to us how Yehoshua responded to the reprimand of the angel. The verse states, “He had slept in the valley.” The Gemara explains this to mean that he had immersed himself in the depths of halacha (Torah). It does not say that Yehoshua had simply “studied” Torah, rather he immersed himself in the depths of halacha.

The deeper one delves into Torah it causes a response from G’d to unleash special level of Divine Assistance into existence, which brings the world to another level. Just as one needs to add to his tefillah in

order to retain clarity and understand who he is, one needs to continuously add to his Torah in order to come upon new levels of understanding.

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#### **Monday Through Friday**

5:50- 6:00 am	Chumash with Rashi
6:00- 6:15 am	Pirkei Avos
6:15- 6:30 am	Mishna Berurah
6:30- 7:25 am	Halacha
6:30 -6:45 am	Mussar
6:45 -7:25 am	Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah
7:25 - 8:20 am	Davening Followed by Breakfast
8:20 - 8:45 am	Mishna
9:00 -10:00 am	Daf Yomi

2:00pm Mincha

#### **Special Weekday Classes**

##### ***Monday***

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**  
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue  
Between E.51<sup>st</sup> and E.52<sup>st</sup>

##### ***Tuesday***

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

##### ***Wednesday***

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**  
Location: Yad Avraham

##### ***Thursday***

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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