



Parshat HaShavuah

תולדות

TOLDOT

כ"ט חשוון תשע"ה

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חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

5:10

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:25

Sunset

5:28

Motzei
Shabbat

6:05



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONS

RABBI DANNY KROLL

About 4 or 5 months into a pregnancy a woman feels a sensation that brings her to the realization that there is something actually living inside of her. For a first-time mother, a baby's kick is a milestone, an awesome happening, something which brings tears to her eyes. In the case of Rivkah Imeinu, the incessant kicking of two babies inside of her was nothing short of awful.


Having been married for 20 years, unable to have children, she is finally pregnant, with twins nonetheless. While still in utero, the twins began to fight and cause Rivkah great physical pain, driving her to her breaking point as she exclaims, "למה זה אנכי" – Why me?" (25:22).

"Why me?" is a loaded question, and there are various attempts amongst the commentators to delineate what exactly Rivkah was expressing. According to Rashi, Rivkah regretted having prayed for a child; had she known how much pain she would be in she would have never asked for a child in the first place. Ramban, however, says something striking: he suggests that Rivkah proclaimed, "If this is what is going to happen to me, why am I alive? I would be better off dead or never born at all."

Rabbi Shlomo Efraim Luntschitz, the 16th century author of the Kli Yakar, states that Rivkah was perplexed by the behavior of her baby in utero. Unfortunately for Rivkah, she did not have an obstetrician to give her an ultrasound, and she was therefore unaware that she was carrying more than one baby inside of her; whenever she walked past a place associated with monotheism she felt intense kicking and whenever she passed a place associated with idolatry and polytheism she also felt intense kicking. Rivkah began to wonder if there was any significance to this strange behavior and she came to the conclusion that indeed there may be *shtei reshuyot*, more than one God. למה זה אנכי, says the Kli Yakar, does not mean "Why me?", but rather, "How am I any different than anyone else?"

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LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)
MONTHLY WRITER

This week's Parsha, Parshat Toldot, begins by listing the descendants of Yitzchak: "And these are the offspring of Yitzchak, son of Avraham—Avraham begot Yitzchak" (25:19). The midrash addresses the famous question of why the pasuk reiterates that "Avraham begot Yitzchak" when it has just called Yitzchak the "son of Avraham."

The midrash explains that at the time there were rumors that Avimelech was Yitzchak's father, that Yitzchak was conceived when Avimelech took Sarah. Therefore, the phrase "Avraham begot Yitzchak" tells us that Hashem made Yitzchak look strikingly similar to Avraham so that there would be no doubt that Yitzchak was Avraham's son.

The midrash goes on to say that in addition to their physical resemblance, Avraham and Yitzchak were analogous to each other spiritually. Yet, Avraham and Yitzchak appear completely different! Avraham is known as man of chesed. He possesses abundant kindness, generosity, and patience. Yitzchak, in contrast, is characterized by *gevurah*, persistence and aggressiveness. Clearly they represent completely different personalities and methods of problem solving. How can it be, then, that Avraham and Yitzchak were identical in spirituality?

The answer is that both father and son had the same goals. The means by which they attained their goals may have been vastly different, but in the end, both strived to become closer to God and to bring others closer to God. Neither method was "better" or more effective. Avraham's personality suited the struggles he was challenged with in his time, and Yitzchak was equipped with the necessary traits to overcome the obstacles of his time.

Despite Avraham and Yitzchak's disparate personalities, it was easy to identify Avraham as Yitzchak's father because of their equal spirituality. Avraham had obviously passed on to Yitzchak the ideals of Torah. For this reason the parsha is titled Toldot. The name emphasizes that Yitzchak came from a lineage of Torah and represents continuity of his father's mission.

EVERLASTING LOVE

AYALA BROIDE ('17)

The theme of this week's parsha, Toldot, revolves around families. There are many things one can learn about raising children and dealing with one's family simply by reading this parsha. However, there's one very interesting pasuk which states that Esav was a hunter and for that Yitzchak loved Esav because Esav hunted for him, while Rivkah loved Yaakov. The obvious question is how could Yitzchak love Esav if Esav was really evil? Didn't Yitzchak know Esav's true personality?

As a hunter, Esav provided Yitzchak with food, demonstrating his great respect for Yitzchak. This made Yitzchak happy, so the Torah writes that Yitzchak "loved" Esav. The Lekach Tov explains that Yitzchak knew that Esav was evil, but the fact that Esav showed him respect proved that there was still hope for him, which is why Yitzchak loved him. Very few people are able to look at an evil person and concentrate on their potential to return to a good path in life. This definitely says something extraordinary about Yitzchak's character.

When the pasuk states that Yitzchak loved Esav, it uses the past tense; however, when describing Rivkah's love, the Torah speaks in the present tense. It's no coincidence that Yitzchak's love was based on something tangible and was therefore short-lived, which is proven when Yitzchak gives Yaakov the brachot – even though most commentaries point out that Yitzchak knew it was Yaakov in front of him all along! In contrast, Rivkah's love for Yaakov is unconditional, making it pure and everlasting!

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NATURE VS. NURTURE

AVIGAYIL BROIDE ('18)

Rashi explains that when Rivkah was pregnant with Yaakov and Esav, something strange was occurring inside Rivkah's womb. When she would pass by a house of Torah, she would feel Yaakov kicking to get out. But then when she would pass a house of idolatry, she would feel Esav kicking to get out.

Even inside the womb, Esav had a predisposition for the wrong, temptuous things. So is it really his fault that Hashem created him this way? It seems that he was simply destined for failure while Yaakov was destined for greatness. Is this fair?

There is great debate between parents and psychologists about what force ultimately shapes one's personality—nature or nurture. Nature is what we enter the world with. Nurture is what our environment does to us.

Esav naturally had a tough personality. But who had a more spiritual environment than he did? Look who he had for parents: Yitzchak and Rivkah! Look who his grandfather was: Avraham! And his brother was Yaakov! He was surrounded by the three most amazing men in Jewish history – our Avot! Despite what his predilections might have been, he had all the resources he needed to fight nature and learn from his elders.

Yaakov, on the other hand, was naturally a good kid and loved his spiritual surroundings. He definitely never had the struggle Esav had with conflicting emotions. But what was his challenge? The answer is his brother Esav, one of the master deceivers of all time. With Esav as a brother, Yaakov was able to maintain his devotion to Hashem and not be influenced by his nefarious brother.

Avraham grew up in the worst environment and found his way back to Hashem. Adam was put in an ideal place and then sinned. Learning from our history, it seems our fate all depends upon our choices. Some make the best of a bad situation while others manage to make the worst from the best.

Living in a society like we do today, with so much good but also so much dangerous temptation, we have to try our hardest to stick to the right path. We must continue making the right choices according to Hashem's will. We should strive to embody Yaakov and learn from Esav's inability to overcome his natural inclinations.

THERE'S MORE TO THE TRUTH

ALYSON WINDERBAUM ('18)

In this week's parsha, Yaakov does something that seems to be immoral – he lies to his father! When Yaakov comes to Yitzchak to receive the blessings that are clearly intended for his “older” brother Esav, he deceives his father into giving him the blessings by saying, "It is I, Esav your firstborn" (27:19). Yet, we characterize Yaakov as a truthful man, the ultimate example of *emet*, *honesty*. *How then do we understand his deception?*

Picture a woman walking down the street. Suddenly, a scary looking guy approaches her and demands her to hand over all her money. Even though this woman has \$300 cash on her, she lies and says she has no money on her. This “lie” is completely permissible!

The Torah's definition of truth is something that is conducive to good and which conforms with the will of the Creator. Thus the counter-deception of saying that you don't have money is in fact truth, because the scary guy is trying to wrongly take what is not his.

Esav was an imposter, fooling his father into thinking that he was righteous. Yaakov's actions were therefore a fulfillment of the truth since Yitzchak himself wanted to give the blessing to the fitting heir and not to the imposter. Therefore, Yaakov's permissible lie prevented Esav from extorting what was never his in the first place.



Rabbi Danny Kroll continued

Until this point she had seen herself as the mother of God's chosen people, but now she feared that there was more than one God and so she was just like everyone else— not the wife of Yitzchak, father of a blessed people, but rather the wife of Yitzchak, just your regular, run-of-the-mill priest, at that time a dime a dozen.

What Rivkah really meant by her question, we will never know, but we know that she sought an answer. The pasuk continues with, "וּתְלַךְ לַדְּרֹשׁ אֶת ה'"—"she went to inquire of God"; she went looking for answers.

The Kli Yakar writes that 'וּתְלַךְ לַדְּרֹשׁ אֶת ה'' means that she went to inquire about the existence of God. Here was Rivkah Imeinu in a desperate situation, struggling to find answers to very real and very difficult theological questions – to the point where she began to question the oneness of God. In the end, God himself reassured her that there was indeed only one God in the world, it was just that there were two babies in her stomach, one who would worship God and another who would be an idolator.

The most striking thing about Rivkah's ordeal is what does not happen. God does not criticize her for having a crisis of faith, for asking questions. We therefore conclude that she did the right thing by asking. Questions are mankind's way of finding out information; without being able to ask religious questions a person's foundation for belief is left weak and vulnerable. By rejecting questions as asinine and foolish, we make the Torah seem fundamentally flawed. There are some questions that cannot be answered right away and some that we will never be able to answer, but those questions should still not make us feel threatened. Instead we should realize that the Torah is by nature complex and intricate and we simply do not always have the answers.

Rivkah's pregnancy brought her to a religious crossroads, but because she was not afraid to question and God was not put off by her questioning, she was able to gain a greater appreciation of God, allowing her to become one of the mothers of our people.

Ayala Broide continued

The Torah is teaching us a very important lesson about love: when we love someone, it must be unconditional or it won't last. We love our families for that reason. We need to look at people for who they are, and not for what they have to offer us or what they have or haven't done for us lately.

Basing our love on any one condition or reason will only spoil it. The same applies for loving Hashem. We can't only love Him when things are good, but we must constantly work on loving Hashem for what He is and what He stands for because He will stand when all else falls or fails!

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