

# FATHERS AND SONS

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Toldos

### Fathers and Sons

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Today's Learning:  
Makkot 1:8-9  
O.C. 38:4-6  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 70  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 5

Our parashah opens: *"And these are the offspring of Yitzchak the son of Avraham - Avraham fathered Yitzchak."* Many commentaries wonder why the Torah mentions that Avraham was the father of Yitzchak, a fact that we surely know. (See Rashi, for example.) R' Menachem Mendel Krochmal z"l (17th century Poland) offers the following explanation:

The Midrash Tanchuma teaches: Sometimes a son suffers degradation because of his father, as the righteous King Yoshiyahu suffered degradation because of his father, the wicked King Amon (see Melachim II chapters 21- 22), and as the righteous King Chizkiyahu suffered degradation because of his father, the wicked King Achaz (see Melachim II chapter 16). On the other hand, a father sometimes suffers degradation because of his children, as the prophet Shmuel did because of his sons, and the Kohen Gadol Eli did because of his sons (see Shmuel I 8:3 and 2:22).

However, concludes the Midrash, neither Avraham nor Yitzchak ever suffered degradation on account of the other. To the contrary, each one was made more distinguished because of his association with the other. Perhaps, writes R' Krochmal, this is the message of our verse. Yitzchak was proud to be Avraham's son, and Avraham was proud to be Yitzchak's father. We find similarly that Yitro and Moshe (father-in-law and son-in-law) each took pride in his relationship with the other.

R' Krochmal adds: It is the way of wise men and it is a sign of righteousness to always attribute one's accomplishments to others. Avraham attributed his accomplishments to Yitzchak, and Yitzchak, to Avraham. Our parashah records also that Yitzchak and Rivka prayed for children "opposite" each other. This means, similarly, that each prayed for children in the other's merit. (Pi Tzaddik: Drush 3)

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*"Esav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents." (25:27)*

Rashi explains: "Knows hunting" -- "literally understanding hunting; understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth; He would ask him, 'Father, how should salt and straw be tithed?' Consequently his father believed him to be very punctilious in observing the commandments."

R' Elazar Meir Preil z"l (1881-1933; rabbi of Elizabeth, N.J.) writes: Esav was the type of person who acts like a Roman when among Romans and a Yerushalmi when in Jerusalem, like an Orthodox Jew when among the Orthodox and a non-religious Jew when among the nonobservant. Can such a lifestyle bring a person happiness? Esav's own words demonstrate that it cannot, for he complained to Yaakov (25:32), "Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?"

In contrast, Yaakov lived a life of consistency. In his youth, he was a wholesome man, dwelling in the tents of Torah study. When he grew up and left home, where did he go? Chazal tell us that on his way to his uncle Lavan's home he detoured to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever for 14 years of Torah study.

Where did all of this lead Yaakov? We read (33:18): "Yaakov arrived whole at the city of Shechem." In contrast to the chameleon-like Esav, Yaakov was the same wholesome person he had been as a youth. (Ha'maor)

Why doesn't the Torah say, "Yaakov was a wholesome man who knows Torah," just as it says that Esav "knows hunting"?

R' Shmuel Halevi Wosner shlita (one of the elder rabbis of Bnei Brak) explains: A Torah student's future success is determined not by what he knows, but by his diligence. Yaakov was not content to know the Torah. Rather, he sat in his tent and toiled to reach greater and greater heights. (Quoted in Otztrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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*"He [Yitzchak] smelled the fragrance of his [Yaakov's] garments and blessed him, saying, 'See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed'." (27:27)*

Rashi z"l comments: "Surely there is no more offensive smell than that of washed goat skins. However, the Torah implicitly tells us that the perfume of the Garden of Eden entered the room with Yaakov."

Why would Yitzchak call the fragrance of Gan Eden "the fragrance of a field"? R' Yitzchak Isaac Liebes z"l (noted American posek) explains:

The Torah relates that just before Yitzchak met his wife Rivka, "Yitzchak went out to pray in the field towards evening." What was he praying for? He was beseeching G-d that his forthcoming marriage produce worthy children who would serve Hashem. Until the moment described in our verse, Yitzchak did not know whether his prayer had been answered, but when he smelled the fragrance of Gan Eden, he knew. Then he said, "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field." This is what I prayed for that day in the field. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

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*"And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine." (27:28)*

The Midrash Breishit Rabbah comments: "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens"-This refers to scripture. "And of the fatness of the earth"- This refers to Mishnah. "And abundant grain"- This refers to Gemara. "And wine"-This refers to Aggadah / the non-halachic portions of the Talmud.

What does this Midrash mean? Furthermore, how are these different sections of the Torah alluded to in our verse? R' Moshe ibn Chaviv z"l (1654-1696; Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim) explains:

The Midrash was bothered by the question: Why would Yitzchak bless his son with material, rather than spiritual, blessings? The Midrash also was bothered by the fact that Yitzchak blessed his son with "dew" rather than with "rain." Therefore the Midrash explains that "dew" refers to scripture. How so? For we read (Devarim 32:2), "May My utterance flow like the dew." In addition, our Sages teach that when Hashem gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, the Jews' souls left them with every word that He uttered. Only when He sprinkled over them the "dew of techiyat ha'maitim" were they revived. [R' ibn Chaviv does not explain what our Sages mean by the expression "dew of techiyat ha'maitim."]

How does the "fatness of the earth" allude to Mishnah? This can be understood in two ways, either pejoratively or as a complement. First, in comparison to the study of Gemara, which requires toil and sweat, Mishnah is light reading. Those who do not exert themselves in study and content themselves with Mishnah are akin to someone who does not exercise his body and becomes fat. Alternatively, because becoming expert in Mishnah requires constant review, only a person who lives in comfortable circumstances and is not distracted by earning a living can excel in Mishnah.

Why is Gemara referred to as "abundant grain"? We are taught, "If there is no flour, there is no Torah." Gemara is the essence of Torah, for it is from Gemara that we derive halachah and learn what the Torah expects of us. Gemara, like flour, is essential to us; therefore, Gemara too is called "flour" or "grain."

Finally, why is Aggadah called "wine"? Because Aggadah is the part of Torah that most attracts people. Just as wine makes man's heart rejoice, so does Aggadah. (Derashot Maharam Chaviv)

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### Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Yitzchak Hutner z"l (1904-1980; rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Chaim Berlin). It is printed in Pachad Yitzchak: Igrot U'ketavim p. 220, and dated 7 Av 5723 [1963].

I have not allowed the trait of zerizut / alacrity to control me with respect to your letter, and, in truth, your letter has waited longer than it should take to answer. The reason is that this letter is one of reproach, and, for as long as I have lived, I have had trouble putting words of reproach into writing. Is not the primary difference between something oral and something written that something written, compared to something oral, is like an enduring world compared to a passing world (as it is written [Yirmiyahu 32:14], "[Take these documents . . .] so that they will endure for many years"). It is impossible to offer reproof without putting on a cloak of [the middat / attribute of] justice. True, open rebuke stems from hidden love [see Mishlei 27:5], but, when all is said and done, the love is hidden and what is revealed is judgment. Certainly, one's heart does not wish that it be said about the judgments associated with the reproach, "so that they will endure for many years." This is the difficulty which I feel when writing words of reproach.

But, when all is said and done, what can be done? Is not withholding reproach also a strict judgment? [Nevertheless,] overcoming this difficulty requires a long wait, and from this derives the lack of alacrity in my response. May it be His will that the open rebuke quickly pass and, as a result, the hidden love will be revealed.

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### Shemittah

Our feature on shemittah will continue next week, iy"H.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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