

A FAMILY FOR THE TORAH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayera

A Family for the Torah

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Today's Learning:
Sanhedrin 8:5-7
O.C. 32:9-11
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 56
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ta'anit 17

In this week's parashah, we continue to read about G-d's special relationship with Avraham Avinu. We also read about the birth of Yitzchak and the beginning of his development. R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z'l (the Chazon Ish; passed away on this date in 5714 / 1953) writes about this early period in our history:

"Adam was created possessing the greatest perfection that a human being can possess, and, through the power of prophecy, he heard Hashem speak concerning all of his affairs. Kayin, too, although he dirtied his hands with the blood of his brother Hevel, did not lose so much of the purity of his soul that he would have become incapable of hearing G-d's voice from on high. Rather, he did hear, "Where is your brother Hevel?" In contrast, the succeeding ten generations, until Noach, were in a lowly state until the [spiritual] sun once again shown on the earth in the days of Noach. Man, the pinnacle and purpose of creation, who was created to recognize his Maker, fell backwards and ran after falsehood for ten generations. However, the tzaddik tamim / perfect, righteous one [Noach] strengthened himself to rise from the depths, his soul bound-up with knowledge of the G- d who saved him from all troubles.

"Then, Noach's generation passed, and the generations that followed lacked understanding and became like animals. They did not fulfill the purpose of their creation, and the world became like an empty vessel for which G-d had no desire until our patriarch, Avraham, came on the scene. He

washed the generation with cleanliness [a play on Tehilim 26:6 or 73:13], removed the brambles from the face of the generation and made it beautiful until they all recognized that they were made in Hashem's image.

"From that time, Torah study never ceased among the Jewish People. Avraham passed it on to Yitzchak, who passed it on to Yaakov, and he to his sons. Eventually, they went down to Egypt, where, our Sages say, the Shechinah went with them. This means that [even in its exile] Yisrael merited the revelation of the Shechinah to uplift it." (Emunah U'bitachon, Ch.6)

"For I have loved him [Avraham], because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice . . ." (Bereishit 18:19)

R' Kolonimus Kalman Shapiro z"l (chassidic rebbe of Piasnecze, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) addresses parents and teachers in strong language in the introduction to his classic work on chinuch / Jewish education as follows: "We are accustomed to looking at today's youth who have thrown off the yoke of Torah as if they alone are responsible for their sorry spiritual state. However, the above verse teaches that it is not so. Every generation is a link in a chain that began with Avraham Avinu. Each generation derives its emunah / faith, Torah, and yir'ah / fear of G-d from the preceding generation. Are our youth not descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov? Do they not possess holy souls? Let us not fool ourselves about who is responsible for the failures of our youth! Picture today's rebellious youth in a prior generation; would they not have been tzaddikim, or at least G-d-fearing men and women? And why? Because their parents would have been more G-d-fearing than we are. Those generations would not have accepted the situation that we accept. They would never have shrugged their shoulders and neglected their duties. What excuses will we offer on the Day of Judgment?" R' Shapiro asks.

He continues: What causes youth to reject the ways of their parents? The primary cause is that they see themselves as mature adults when, in fact, they are still children. A young person who has such feelings cannot be taught to live a Torah life by being lectured about mitzvah observance. Habit, also, will not keep such a young person on the path of mitzvah-observance. Rather, it is necessary to appeal to the youth's feeling of self-importance. He must be convinced that he is a sapling that G-d Himself planted in the orchard that we call "the Jewish People." Only if the youth is made to feel that G-d truly cares about his success can there be hope.

Some teachers see their job as lecturing children about their mitzvah - obligations. Some parents see their task as helping children develop good habits. Neither of these practices is "chinuch," declares R' Shapiro. Yes, they are tools of chinuch, but they are not the essence of chinuch.

A related mistake that many teachers and parents make, writes R' Shapiro, is to focus their efforts on raising good children. The true goal of parents and teachers should be to raise good adults. The job of teachers and parents is to help the flower within each child blossom, i.e., to give each child the

tools he or she will need so that the child's holy neshamah will reach its full potential when the child does become an adult. This requires discovering the unique potential within each soul and facilitating its development. That is the essence of chinuch, and that is the true meaning of King Shlomo's famous dictum (Mishlei 22:6), "Train the youth according to his way; even when he grows old, he will not swerve from it." (Chovat Ha'talmidim)

Shemittah

This week we continue to discuss the "Hetter Mechirah" / the sale of the land to a gentile for the duration of the shemittah year. R' Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l (Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel; died 1959) writes that our ability to act leniently and permit the Hetter Mechirah rests on three principles in combination:

- 1.** It is widely accepted that, in our era, shemittah is "only" a mitzvah d'rabbanan / a rabbinically ordained mitzvah. [Therefore, as discussed at length last week, it can be set aside in order to further the Torah-obligation of settling the Land.]
 - 2.** According a small minority of Rishonim / rabbinic authorities of the 11th-13th centuries, there is no mitzvah of shemittah at all when the majority of the Jewish People live outside of Eretz Yisrael. (R' Herzog notes that according to R' Yosef Engel z"l, one of the leading supporters of the Hetter Mechirah, this is the strongest argument in favor of ruling leniently vis-à-vis shemittah observance.)
 - 3.** Although there is now a consensus about when shemittah should be observed in practice, we are not absolutely certain that our count is historically correct. This is itself a matter of dispute among the Rishonim. (She'eilot U'teshuvot B'mitzvot Ha'teluyot B'aretz No. 49)
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As noted in prior issues, the authority most closely associated with the Hetter Mechirah was R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865 - 1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael). Significantly, R' Kook himself emphasized that the leniency should be relied on only as absolutely necessary. He wrote, for example:

"I have already said many times that there can be no doubt whatsoever about the validity of the Hetter [Mechirah]. Nevertheless, this does not exempt us from seeking all possible solutions that Hashem will help us discover so that our brethren, Bnei Yisrael who are living in the Holy Land, will fulfill shemittah properly without seeking ways to avoid it or leniencies. Every little corner of Eretz Yisrael that is under the control of Jews and in which the mitzvah of Shemittah is observed in accordance with law should cause us to rejoice as if we had found a great treasure. However, G-d forbid that we should speak disparagingly about Jews. The Hetter Mechirah may not be the way of the pious, and our spirit cringes within us at the lowly state of our nation and the terrible [economic] conditions of the nation of G-d that resides on the Holy Land that needs to rely on this leniency.

However, even [a halachic leniency] arrived at out of necessity has the status of Torah, and all gedolei Yisrael / great rabbis of the Jewish People should be comforting the broken hearts of those who need to rely on this leniency so that they will not be wicked in their own eyes. G-d forbid that one thinks that, when the holy descendants [of the Patriarchs] are acting in accordance with the ruling of sages, G-d will be angry with them. Such is not my view. We should be promoting the proper performance of the mitzvah [of shemittah] by promoting love of G-d and of His commandments, which are sweeter than honey, not by promoting fear of G-d's wrath." (Mishpat Kohen No. 63)

R' Yaakov Beruchin z"l

R' Yaakov ben R' Aharon was born in 5548 (1787/8). He and his brother, R' Yitzchak (author of the Talmud commentary Keren Orah) were among the leading students of R' Chaim of Volozhin. It is said that R' Chaim sometimes asked R' Yaakov to lecture in the yeshiva.

R' Yaakov was rabbi of Karlin and was recognized as one of the leading sages of his generation. He is best known today for his halachic work Mishkenot Yaakov.

R' Yaakov is credited with "discovering" R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, who would be the leading Lithuanian posek / halachic authority of the second half of the 19th century. (As previously discussed, R' Yitzchak Elchanan is considered to be the posek who originally authorized the Hetter Mechirah for the shemittah year of 5649.) R' Yaakov's "discovery" occurred after R' Yitzchak Elchanan lost all of his wedding presents in a business venture and came to seek R' Yaakov's advice. Finding R' Yaakov immersed in a Talmudic problem, R' Yitzchak Elchanan volunteered that the question was answered in a certain work. R' Yaakov was so impressed with the young scholar that he recommended R' Yitzchak Elchanan for his first rabbinical position. (He also gave the young scholar 40 rubles.)

R' Yaakov died in 5605 (1844/5). In his last minutes, he asked his son to read to him from Ramban's Torah commentary because he was very fond of that work. The tombstone which R' Yaakov shares with his brother reads in part:

On the death of the two sons of Aharon - The staff of Aharon gave forth a blossom and a flower and it was to the congregation of Israel a miracle and a wonder. The honor of Hashem shone on the house of Aharon. These two sons of his were a wonder; they were known as the genius of Yaakov and Yitzchak, and they raised a banner and a mast on the sea of Torah. They were known to their nation for their [written] works Kehillot and Mishkenot Yaakov and Keren Orah. Woe! The cedars of G-d in the land; they studied the Torah of Hashem the entire day. Who will teach our nation? Who will close the breach?

(Readers may recognize the many biblical allusions in the above text.) (Sources: Gedolei Torah p.

571-572; Avi Ha'yeshivot p.416)

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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** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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