

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Toldos

Like Father, Like Son

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)

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

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 Vosner shlita (a leading halachic authority in Bnei Brak) explains: A Torah student's future success is determined not by what he knows, but by his diligence. Yaakov wasn't content to know the Torah. Rather, he sat in his tent and toiled to reach greater and greater heights. (Quoted in Otztrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"Yaakov gave Esav bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, got up and left; thus, Esav despised the birthright." (25:34)

R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin z"l (1816-1893; rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Volozhin, Russia; known as "Netziv") was called upon to judge the following din Torah / court case: A person--call him Reuven--was considered by his neighbors to be a righteous man. Reuven sold half his merits and mitzvot to a well-meaning, very wealthy, but naive, person--call him Shimon--for 20,000 rubles. Shimon paid half the purchase price up-front. Then he went to a Torah scholar, who asked the Heavenly Court in a dream whether this was a good bargain. The Heavenly Court responded that Reuven was not held in as high esteem in heaven as he was among his neighbors. Therefore, Shimon sued for the return of the money he had paid, while Reuven counter-sued for the second half of the purchase price.

Netziv responded: First, the mere fact that Reuven would sell his spiritual reward for money shows that he is less than upright. He is like Esav, who sold the birthright, and about whom the Torah says, "Esav despised the birthright." This was not because he sold the birthright for a bowl of stew; Rashbam z"l (died 1158; Rashi's grandson) writes that Yaakov paid Esav a large sum of money, and the stew merely sealed the deal. Rather, the Torah says that Esav despised the birthright because a thinking person understands that the spiritual world is priceless. No upright person would sell his Olam Ha'ba for money, which is like a person receiving a medallion from the Czar and pawning it, writes Netziv.

He continues: Do not confuse this with a situation in which Reuven and Shimon agree that Reuven will support Shimon in exchange for half the merit of Shimon's Torah study. There, Shimon would be unable to study without support and Reuven is enabling Shimon's Torah study. As such, Reuven deserves half of Shimon's reward. In this case, in contrast, Reuven sold his mitzvot after the fact.

Netziv continues: In reality, the reward for mitzvot is inherently different from the reward for Torah study. The former is like receiving a medallion from the Czar, while the latter is like being seated in the Czar's cabinet. Someone who sits in the Czar's cabinet but is ignorant of matters of state will be exposed as a charlatan and a fool. When a person supports Torah scholars, Hashem gives him the wisdom (in Olam Ha'ba) to sit among Torah scholars and hold his own in their discussion. However,

one can't obtain that privilege simply by buying someone else's Torah study after the fact. Thus, any attempt by Reuven (in our case) to sell the reward for his Torah study is worthless.

Regarding the reward for Reuven's other mitzvot, Netziv continues, Reuven can't sell that either. First, it does not yet exist, and halachah doesn't recognize the sale of things that don't yet exist ("davar she'lo ba l'olam"). Second, no kinyan/ legal act of transfer took place. Halachah does not recognize transactions that involve words alone; some legal act (other than the transfer of money) is necessary. Finally, Netziv writes, reward and punishment are natural, albeit spiritual, consequences of performing mitzvot and committing sins, respectively--like taking medicine or drinking poison. If Reuven received a vaccine, can the resulting protection be sold to Shimon who did not receive the vaccine? Of course not. Accordingly, the entire sale had no legal effect. (Meishiv Davar 3:14)

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

R' Avraham ben Natan Ha'Yarchi z"l (12th century; Provence) writes: It is a universal custom to recite this verse ("Ve'yeetain lecha") and other verses containing blessings on motzai Shabbat so that the coming week will be blessed. (Sefer Ha'manhig: Hilchot Shabbat No.75)

R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l (1745-1812; first Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the Ba'al Ha'tanya) writes that the reason for lengthening the prayers on motzai Shabbat is that sinners in Gehinnom are given a reprieve for Shabbat, and by delaying the end of our prayers, we lengthen their reprieve. (Shulchan Aruch Ha'Rav: O.C. 495:1)

R' Yitzchak Menachem Weinberg shlita (the Tolna Rebbe in Yerushalayim) asks: Ordinarily, one must be happy in order to bless someone effectively. That's why kohanim don't recite Birkat Kohanim / the Priestly Blessing daily in the Diaspora, unlike in Eretz Yisrael. In the Diaspora, kohanim are not happy enough to bless the congregation, except on yom tov. According to some authorities, a kohen who is single may not recite Birkat Kohanim because a person who is not married lacks complete happiness. (Others disagree; see Shulchan Aruch: O.C. 128:44.) If that is the case, what do we gain by reciting verses containing blessings on motzai Shabbat? That is a sad time when the pleasures of Shabbat are finished, the "neshamah yetairah" / "extra" soul that we have on Shabbat leaves us, and the wicked are sent back to Gehinnom!

He explains: Even according to the opinion that a kohen who is not married should not recite Birkat Kohanim, he may do so together with other people because their joy will rub off on him. Similarly, though we have reasons to be sad on Motzai Shabbat, we have the ability to be happy because Motzai Shabbat is associated by our Sages with King David--indeed, melaveh malkah is known as

the "King David's meal"--and he was an eternally optimistic and happy person. The verse (Shmuel I 16:12) describes King David as having "beautiful eyes," a sign of joy, as we read in Mishlei (15:30), "The eyes' light will gladden the heart." Notwithstanding his many enemies and difficult life experiences, King David never lost his faith and optimism. By letting King David's optimism rub off on us, we, too, can be happy on motzai Shabbat. (Chamin B' motzai Shabbat p.117)

Shemittah

We continue to discuss the halachic controversy surrounding the "hetter mechirah," the sale of the Land of Israel to a non-Jew for the shemittah year. R' Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l (1888-1959; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel) writes that our ability to be lenient regarding shemittah by relying on the hetter mechirah rests on three principles in combination:

1. It is widely accepted that, so long as the majority of the Jewish People lives outside of Eretz Yisrael, shemittah has the force only of a mitzvah mi'd'rabbanan / rabbinic enactment, not a mitzvah d'oraita / Torah commandment. [Therefore, it can be set aside in order to further the Torah-obligation of settling Eretz Yisrael or because of the great poverty that prevailed in the early settlements.]
2. There are Geonim and Rishonim (rabbinic authorities of the 13th century and earlier) who hold that from the time that semichah / ordination in an uninterrupted chain from Moshe Rabbeinu ceased to exist (in the 4th century, approximately) and the Yovel / Jubilee Year ceased to be sanctified, there is no mitzvah of shemittah even mi'd'rabbanan. Rather, observing the shemittah is only an act of chassidut / extra piety. R' Yosef Engel z"l (1859-1910; rabbi of Krakow, Poland) wrote that this is "a significant reason for leniency."
3. Although there is now a consensus about when shemittah should be observed in practice, we are not absolutely certain that this is the correct year. This is itself a matter of dispute among the Rishonim. [According to Rashi, for example, the shemittah was last year.] (She'eilot U'teshuvot B'mitzvot Ha'teluyot B'aretz No. 49)

It is important to emphasize that none of the above reasons justifies simply ignoring the shemittah year. Rather, the nature of the halachic process is that a combination of opinions, even minority opinions as the second and third reasons above are, can be used in combination to be lenient in certain cases of great need or emergency.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with

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