FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Following In His Father's Footsteps

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Toldos

There is an interesting Medrash in Parshas V'Zos HaBracha. The Medrash teaches that if a Chazan errs in his public repetition of the Shmoneh Esrei and needs to be replaced, his replacement begins from the beginning of the blessing in which the error was made. The source of this ruling comes from the practice of the Patriarchs.

Avraham blessed Yitzchak and gave him all that he had: (VAYITEN Avraham es kol asher lo l'Yitzchak) [Bereishis 25:5]. When Yitzchak, following the path of his father, gave a blessing to his son (Yaakov) he began with V'YITEN Lecha Elokim (Bereishis 27:28).

Yitzchak concluded his blessing to Yaakov with the verb "Vayikra," as it is written "Vayikra Yitzchak el Yaakov vaYevarech oso" [And Yitzchak called out to Yaakov and he blessed him] [Bereishis 28:1]. So too, when Yaakov was ready to bless his sons, he decided to begin his blessings with the word where his father left off as it is written "Vayikra Yaakov el banav" [and Yaakov called for his sons] [Bereishis 49:1].

Yaakov concluded his blessing to his sons with the word "V'Zos": "V'Zos asher diber lahem avihem" [And this is what their father spoke to them] [Bereishis 49:28] and Moshe therefore began his final blessing to the Jewish people with the word "V'Zos" as it is written "V'Zos HaBracha asher beirach Moshe..." [And this is the blessing that Moshe bestowed...] [Devorim 33:1].

The Medrash continues -- Moshe ended his blessing with the words "Ashrecha Yisrael mi kamocha" [Happy are you Israel who is like you] [Devorim 33:29] and Dovid haMelech [King David] began his blessing with the words "Ashrei Yoshvei Beisecha" [Happy are those who dwell in your house] [Tehillim 84:5].

This is more than a very cute Medrash. Each Patriarch began with the word where his predecessor left off. Obviously, the Medrash is teaching us something more than this simple word play. Before we discover what that might be, let us return to this week's parsha -- Parshas Toldos.

Sefer [the book of] Bereishis is the book of the Patriarchs. If we look at the break up of the sefer in

terms of mere lines of print, the coverage given to the 3 patriarchs is far from balanced. The Patriarch Avraham is allotted the Parshiyos of Lech Lecha, Vayeara and Chayei Sarah. Next week begins the narrative of Yaakov's life that spans Vayetzei, Vayishlach, and Vayeishev. There is a bit of a digression in Vayeishev and Miketz regarding the story of Yosef and his brothers. But then in Vayigash and Vayechi we are back to the story of Yaakov Avinu. So Avraham is the main feature of 3 Parshiyos. Yaakov arguably owns 6 Parshiyos. However, Yitzchak gets barely one Parsha (Toldos). Even within this parsha we have precious few pasukim [verses] that deal with events in which Yitzchak plays the leading role. The "middle Patriarch" apparently gets short shrift.

The point that we are coming to explain is not why Yitzchak seemingly gets short shrift, bu t rather that we really do not know much about him. We know who Avraham is. We know him as the man of Chessed [kindness]; we know him as the paradigm of mesiras nefesh [self-sacrifice] who successfully passed 10 Divine tests. In terms of word association, we link him with Chesed. Concerning Yaakov Avinu we also have a good idea. He is the Ish Emes [man of truth]. He is the paradigm of diligence in study - the Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim [unsophisticated man who dwells constantly in the tent of Torah study].

Who is Yitzchak? More importantly, what is his contribution to us? These are our patriarchs. We know which personality traits and characteristics we derive from Avraham and Yaakov. But, what attribute is it that Yitzchak bequeathed to us?

The following idea appears in varying forms in the writings of Rav Elyakim Schlessinger, Rav Chaim Yaakov Zaichik, and Rav Matisyahu Solomon - to name just a few who deal with this issue in a similar fashion.

The true iden tity of Yitzchak Avinu is revealed in Parshas Vayeitzei, where Yaakov refers twice to his father as "Pachad Yitzchak" [Bereishis 31:41; 31:53]. The word "pachad" means fear. What does the term "Pachad Yitzchak" mean?

When we read the narrative of Parshas Toldos, one thing jumps out at us about Yitzchak. More than anything else, he wanted to replicate the life of Avraham Avinu. For instance, when there was a famine in Canaan, he went to Avimelech King of Plishtim [Bereishis Chapter 26], exactly as his father had done a generation earlier [Bereishis Chapter 20]. In fact, when he was in Gerar, Avimelech's city, G-d appeared to him and told him "Do not go down to Egypt...". Why would Yitzchak have considered going down to Egypt? Rashi tells us: "For his intent was to go down to Egypt, just as his father had done during the famine in his time [Bereishis Chapter 12]".

Yitzchak Avinu's automatic reaction to any situation in life was: "What would my father have done under these circumstances?" This is the pattern by which he lived his life: "I have to keep the tradition and the messorah [spiritual legacy] of my father". The Almighty knows this about Yitzchak and therefore needed to intervene and tell him not to go down to Egypt as his father had done. This is Pachad Yitzchak. Yitzchak was afraid to deviate one iota from the path paved for him by his father,

Avraham.

This tendency is clearly illustrated in the incident involving the wells. Yitzchak re-digs the very same wells originally dug by his father. Not only did he dig the same wells, he gave them the very same names [Bereishis 26:17-18]. Why is this incident significant enough for Jewish history that the Torah should record it for posterity? Why indeed is this one of the very few facts the Torah chooses to tell us about the life of Yitzchak Avinu? The answer is that this incident gives us the key to understanding the legacy of Yitzchak. His legacy is "I have to keep the tradition of my father."

Throughout human history, sons do not want to keep the traditions of their fathers. The father was old fashioned; his ways are "old hat". "That is the way my father did things, I am going to start something new!" Children typically want to make their own mark in the world. They do not want to keep the company running just the way their father - who built it from scratch - had it running. They want to "improve" processes, expand markets, update business practices, and do it "their way".

Yitzchak did not fit into this mold. Yitzchak said: "If my father dug wells then I am going to dig the same wells. I am going to call them by the same names that my father called them." Rabbeinu Bechaye writes explicitly: The fact that the Torah records this about Yitzchak shows it is a praiseworthy attribute and that we should learn a lesson for ourselves not to deviate from the ways of our fathers.

With this insight, we can understand the enigmatic Medrash with which we began:

My father said the blessing with the word "V'Yiten". I too will bless my children with the word "V'Yiten". Yaakov too learned from his father: My father ended with the word "VaYikra", I am going to begin with the word "VaYikra". And Moshe picked up from Yaakov with the word "V'Zos" and Dovid haMelech picked up from Moshe with the word "Ashrei". Each generation followed the tradition of their ancestors, keeping the messorah of the patriarchs.

This is what Pachad Yitzchak means. Yitzchak was the first Patriarch to be the son of a righteous father. Avraham Avinu did not deal with the issue of a righteous father who would pass on spiritual traditions to him. Avraham was the iconoclast who had to blaze his own spiritual trail. But Yitzchak had tradition. He had a righteous father and so the role he modeled for his children was Pachad Yitzchak - the fear and hesitancy to veer one iota off the spiritual course blazed for him by his righteous fath er.

Keep the tradition of your parents. That is what Yitzchak is all about.

One may ask, was not Yitzchak also innovative? The Rambam teaches that he instituted the Mincha prayer and was the first to offer tithes [Mishneh Torah Hilchos Melachim 9:1]? Upon further analysis, however, this is not an anomaly. Yitzchak's "innovations" were not trailblazing, new spiritual institutions. He merely buttressed the innovations of his father because he felt that he needed some added spiritual activity to achieve the same level of spirituality that his father Avraham was able to

attain without these "innovations".

Yitzchak did not say "My father prayed once a day, so it is enough that I pray once a day." He felt "I am not as good as my father. For my father it sufficed to pray just once a day. On my lower level, I need to pray at least twice a day!" Likewise, he felt "My father did not need to quantify his feelings of hakaras hatov [gratitude] to the Almighty because it came to him naturally. I am not on his level. I must quantify my feelings of hakaras hatov. I will commit to take off ma'aser [tithes]." All this, however, was in the context of Avraham's legacy. Ultimately, Yitzchak's basic essence was not one of innovation; it was one of following tradition. Pachad Yitzchak: Keeping to the legacy of his father alive.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Toldos Sarah are provided below:

Tape # 031 - Marriage Between Relatives
Tape # 073 - Non-Kosher Medicines and the Birchas Hareiach (Scents)
Tape # 122 - G'neivas Da'as: Deception and Your Fellow Man
Tape # 169 - The Blind Person in Halacha
Tape # 215 - V'sain Tal U'matar
Tape # 259 - "Sorfin Al Hachzakos": The Concept of Chazaka in Halacha
Tape # 305 - The Bracha of "Baruch Sheptarani"
Tape # 349 - Must Mincha Have a "Chazoras Hashatz"?
Tape # 393 - Neitz Hachama vs. Tefilah B'tzibur
Tape # 437 - Accepting Tzeda ka from Women
Tape # 481 - Lying to Keep What's Yours
Tape # 525 - Maris Ayin
Tape # 569 - Yichud With Relatives
Tape # 613 - Shiva and the Wayward Son
Tape # 657 - Fascinating Insights into the Tefilah of Mincha
Tape # 701 - Fasting on The Wedding Day
Tape # 745 - The Cost of Stealing a Mizvah
Tape # 789 - The Power of Your Own Words
Tape # 833 - Six or Ten People for Chazoras Hashatz?
Tape # 877 - Bar Mitzvah Sh'ailos
Tape # 921 - Accepting Someone Else's Curse

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.