

Insights Parshas Toldos Kislev 5780*Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University***Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig***This week's Insights is sponsored in loving memory of Luba Kirsh by**Dr. William Kirsh. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"***Did You Know...****As this is the year before a leap year, Thursday night, December 5th, we start saying v'sein tal umatar in Shemoneh****Esrei.** What's interesting to note is that this is one of the only times that we do something based upon the English calendar, rather than the Jewish calendar. Why is this so? The Gemara (Taanis 10a) says that in Bavel they would start saying v'sein tal umatar on the 60th day after the autumnal equinox, which is based on the solar year. The secular calendar is based on the solar year so this would seem to make sense. The only issue is that 60 days after the autumnal equinox (September 22) would be November 22, this is 13 days before December 5th. So how did this come to be?

When the Gemara established this halacha, they were using the Julian calendar (named for Julius Caesar), while today we use the Gregorian calendar. However, when Pope Gregory XIII introduced the Gregorian calendar in 1582 ten days had to be removed to get the calendar back in sync with astronomical events such as the winter solstice. So some people, apparently, had no birthday that year - probably making some little kids cry and a lot of women happy.

Interestingly enough, the U.S. didn't adopt the new calendar until 1752, forcing them to eliminate 11 days. Turkey (always late to the party) didn't adopt the new calendar until 1927 when they had to eliminate 13 days.

Currently (1901-2099), the Julian calendar is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. This is why we add an extra 13 days to the count. Before 1900, there was only 12 extra days; skipping year 2000, and after 2100, there will be 14, making the normal day we change the bracha the night of December 5th (and the year before a leap year December 6th).

Failing Forward*Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments my statutes, and my Torahs (26:5).*

In this week's parsha, Hashem appears to Yitzchak, reaffirms the promises that He made to Avraham, and assures Yitzchak that they will come to pass. Interestingly, Hashem also tells Yitzchak the reason for this commitment to Avraham; "Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments my statutes, and my Torahs."

The Gemara (Nedarim 32a) uses this verse to teach us a remarkable piece of information about Avraham Avinu's life. "Said R' Ami son of Abba - 'Avraham was three years old when he recognized his creator, as the verse says: Because (eikev) obeyed my voice...The numerical value of the word "eikev" is 172. Avraham lived until the age of 175; subtract 172 from 175 and you're left with three. The verse is therefore teaching us that at the age of 3 Avraham first recognized Hashem."

Raavad uses this Gemara to ask a devastating question on Rambam. In Hilchos Avodah Zara Maimonides gives a lengthy introduction as to the history of idol worship. He explains how idol worship came to be and how the earlier generations erred and came to literally worship the stars and constellations (with some minor but notable exceptions such as Mesushelach, Noach, Shem, Ever, etc). This continued until the birth of the "pillar of the world" - Avraham Avinu.

Rambam explains that in his youth Avraham actually worshipped idols with his family; yet he always wondered who was really causing the earth to continuously revolve, and his heart was exploring and gaining understanding. Ultimately, he realized that there was one God who created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other

entities. He also knew that the entire world was making a mistake: "Avraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to debate with others, telling them that they were not following a proper path..." (Hilchos Avodah Zara 1:3).

Rambam states outright that Avraham was forty when he became aware of his creator. So, asks Ravaad (ad loc), how can Rambam write that Avraham was forty when the Gemara so clearly states that he was three? The answer is that at the age of three Avraham began his quest to find the real truth. In reality, it took many years and many missteps to arrive at the truth. Avraham was forty when he finally crystallized the proper philosophical theology and began to preach it to the world. Rambam fully agrees that this process began when Avraham was three.

According to Rambam, the Talmud is making a remarkable statement; even though in his teens he may have worshipped idols and made other mistakes, since these were all part of his honest process to arrive at the truth it is considered as if he followed Hashem from the age of three. In other words, when at the age of forty he began his mission to bring God into this world, he was bringing forward all his experiences and everything he learned from his youth. Since he had experienced the enlightenment process himself, he could now show others the true and proper path.

Often, ba'alei teshuvah (and others that have made a significant turnaround in their lives), try to suppress their prior life and actions, and pretend like they never happened. We see from here that this is not the right approach. Rather, Hashem wants us to utilize those experiences to help others, in that way one elevates the entire process of one's earlier life. We must remember that this is the reason given to Yitzchak as to why Hashem will fulfill the promises made to Avraham - this process of growth to enlightenment and sharing it with others.

Familial Ambivalence

It was told to Rifkah the words of her older son, Eisav. She sent for her younger son Yaakov and said to him, 'Behold your brother Eisav is consoling himself with thoughts of killing you' (27:42).

The end of this week's parsha recounts the episode of Yaakov taking Eisav's bracha, which caused Eisav to feel hatred toward Yaakov. Their concerned mother, Rifkah, warns Yaakov of Eisav's murderous thoughts and counsels him to escape the country and take refuge with her brother Lavan in Charan.

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash Rabbah's interpretation of the word "misnachem - consoling": "You are already dead in his eyes, and he has drunk a cup of consolation over you."

This Midrash seems a little difficult to understand; if Eisav has murderous intentions and wants to kill Yaakov why does he need to drink a cup of consolation; what is there to be consoled about? We find a similarly strange incident recounted by Rashi in next week's parsha (29:11). Elifaz was ordered by his father Eisav to pursue Yaakov and kill him. Upon finding Yaakov, Elifaz - who had grown up in the "close embrace of his grandfather Yitzchak" - was hesitant to follow his father's command. On the other hand, he was also very reluctant to disobey his father. This was quite a quandary.

Thereupon, Yaakov suggested that Elifaz confiscate all of his wealth as, Chazal teach, a poor man is considered like a dead person. Elifaz was able to fulfill both of his conflicting desires by following Yaakov's suggestion; thus Yaakov arrived at Lavan's house utterly destitute, and Elifaz returned home feeling that he had honored his father's wishes.

But in reality this seems to be an untenable solution. After all, the truth that Yaakov was alive and well would eventually come out. At some point Eisav would find out that his son Elifaz disobeyed him and let Yaakov live. How does Chazal's dictum of a poor man being considered like a dead person fulfill what Eisav intention?

Sigmund Freud, father of the field of psychoanalysis, once said, "An intimate friend and a hated enemy have always been indispensable requirements for my emotional life; I have always been able to create

them anew, and not infrequently my childish ideal has been so closely approached that friend and enemy coincided in the same person."

Notwithstanding the obviously complicated mind and seemingly confused emotional state of Freud, he was articulating the phenomena of a love-hate relationship. We often find this ambivalence of feelings in situations where there are emotional ties that are complicated by personal commitments that are frustrating to fulfill - inevitably leading to resentment.

Fascinatingly, in Hebrew the word for lover, "ohev," and the word for enemy, "oyev," are almost identical. The reason is obvious, they are really one and the same emotion. In both instances one desires to become "one" with the other. In love one wants to merge together, while in hate one desires to swallow the other and incorporate the enemy into himself.

Eisav has very conflicting emotions about Yaakov, after all they are not only brothers, but twins who share almost exactly the same DNA. In essence, they are forever tied together (interestingly enough, Chazal point out that they were both buried together on the same day). Eisav has expectations of Yaakov and feels betrayed by him; therefore he both hates and loves him. This is the conflict that rages within Eisav. We see this most clearly when they actually meet in Parshas Vayishlach; Eisav hugs and kisses and then, according to Chazal, tries to bite the neck of Yaakov.

Elifaz senses this conflict within his father. He knows that while Eisav wants Yaakov hunted down he still loves his brother. Elifaz hopes that eliminating Yaakov as a threat by taking away his money but not killing him, will satisfy both feelings within Eisav - that of love and that of hate.

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Weekly Parsha TOLDOT Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Sibling rivalry is the name of the game. In fact, the entire book of Bereishis can be described as a narrative of sibling rivalry. We have Kayin and Hevel, Avraham and his nephew Lot, Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav and Yosef and his brothers. It is as though the Torah wishes to inform and impress upon us the true nature of human beings.

I often think that that is what is meant when the Torah said that the nature of human beings is bad from its onset. We are by nature competitive creatures and the competition always begins at home and with those who are closest to us. We should not think of our children as being angelic but rather deal with their true nature and recognize the pitfalls that natural sibling rivalry will always engender.

Every child is a different world and no two - even identical twins - are the same. Because of this fact of human nature, competitiveness is built into the structure of all children. It is the task of education and the home to channel this competitiveness into positive behavior and creative goals. This is what the Rabbis meant by their statement that the competitiveness between scholars and wise men is a method for increasing wisdom and understanding generally. Without competitiveness there can be very little creativity or advancement in all forms of life - technology, healthcare, finance, politics and human nature. The task is to direct this competitiveness towards positive aims and to limit it so that it does not descend into violence and tyranny.

Part of the problem with Eisav is not competitiveness but rather insecurity. He always feels his younger brother tugging at his heel and preventing him from achieving the greatness that he feels is his due. Because of this insecurity, he seeks fame and fortune in opposing the ideas and lifestyle of his own very family. He scorns his birthright because he feels that fulfilling its demands will only inhibit him. He feels that only by being different than Yaakov can he achieve permanent respect. As all his plans crumble, he cries out in anguish to his father that he wants the blessings that Yaakov has received. He realizes that only in those blessings, which he will have to share always with Yaakov, can his destiny truly be fulfilled.

This is what Yaakov himself tells Eisav at their last meeting, which we will read about in a few weeks. Eventually Yaakov will come to the mountain of Eisav and then Eisav will be redeemed by his acceptance of Yaakov and of the moral values and tradition of his family. Throughout the books of Tanach, we find this constant struggle of insecurity versus acceptance and competitiveness versus conformity. We are uncomfortable when we see people who are different than we are. But the only way to achieve personal greatness is by realizing that our own inner security need not be weakened by competitiveness with others.

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Isaac and Esau (Toldot 5780) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It's a haunting question. Why did Isaac love Esau? The verse says so explicitly: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Whichever way we read this verse, it is perplexing. If we read it literally, it suggests that Isaac's affections were governed by no more than a taste in a particular kind of food. Surely that is not the way love is earned or given in the Torah.

Rashi, citing a Midrash, suggests that the phrase translated as, "who had a taste for wild game," and referring to Isaac, in fact refers to Esau, and should be read "there was hunting in his mouth," meaning that he used to entrap and deceive his father by his words. Esau deceived Isaac into thinking that he was more pious and spiritual than in fact he was.

Bolstering this interpretation, some suggest that Isaac, having grown up in the household of Abraham and Sarah, had never encountered deception before, and was thus, in his innocence, misled by his son. Rebecca, who had grown up in the company of Laban, recognised it very well, which is why she favoured Jacob, and why she was later so opposed to Isaac's blessing going to Esau.

Yet the text suggests undeniably that there was a genuine bond of love between Esau and Isaac. The Zohar says that no one in the world honoured his father as Esau honoured Isaac.[1] Likewise, Isaac's love for Esau is evident in his desire to bless him. Note that Abraham did not bless Isaac. Only on his deathbed, did Jacob bless his children. Moses blessed the Israelites on the last day of his life. When Isaac sought to bless Esau, he was old and blind, but not yet on his deathbed: "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death" (Gen. 27:2). This was an act of love.

Isaac, who loved Esau, was not deceived as to the nature of his elder son. He knew what he was and what he wasn't. He knew he was a man of the field, a hunter, mercurial in temperament, a man who could easily give way to violence, quickly aroused to anger, but equally quickly, capable of being distracted and forgetting.

He also knew that Esau was not the child to continue the covenant. That is manifest in the difference between the blessing Isaac gave Jacob in Genesis 27 (believing him to be Esau), and the blessing in Genesis 28 that he gave Jacob, knowing him to be Jacob.

The first blessing, intended for Esau, is about wealth - "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" - and power, "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow to you." The second blessing, intended for Jacob as he was leaving home, is about children - "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" - and a land - "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of ... the land God gave to Abraham." The patriarchal blessings are not about wealth and power; they are about children and the land. So Isaac knew all along that the covenant would be continued by Jacob; he was not deceived by Esau. Why then did he love him, encourage him, wish to bless him?

The answer, I believe, lies in three extraordinary silences. The most pointed is the question, What happened to Isaac after the Binding? Look at the text in Genesis 22 and you will see that as soon as the angel has stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac drops out of the picture

completely. The text tells us that Abraham returned to the two servants who accompanied them on the way, but there is no mention of Isaac.

This is a glaring mystery, tantalising the commentators. Some go so far as to say that Isaac actually died at the Binding and was brought back to life. Ibn Ezra quotes this interpretation and dismisses it.[2] Shalom Spiegel's *The Last Trial* is a book-length treatment of this idea.[3] Where was Isaac after the trial of the Binding?

The second silence is the death of Sarah. We read that Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and weep for her. But the primary mourner in Judaism is traditionally the child. It should have been Isaac leading the mourning. But he is not mentioned in the entire chapter 23 that relates to Sarah's death and its consequences.

The third is in the narrative in which Abraham instructed his servant to find a wife for his son. There is no record in the text that Abraham consulted with Isaac his son, or even informed him. Abraham knew that a wife was being sought for Isaac; Abraham's servant knew; but we have no idea as to whether Isaac knew, and whether he had any thoughts on the subject. Did he want to get married? Did he have any particular preference as to what his wife should be like? The text is silent. Only when the servant returns with his wife-to-be, Rebecca, does Isaac enter the narrative at all.

The text itself is significant: "Isaac had come from Be'er Lahai Roi." What was this place? We have encountered it only once before. It is where the angel appeared to Hagar when, pregnant, she fled from Sarah who was treating her harshly (Gen. 16:14). An ingenious Midrash says that when Isaac heard that Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for him, he said to himself, "Can I live with a wife while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him." [4] A later text tells us that "After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Be'er Lahai Roi" (Gen. 25:11). On this, the Midrash says that even after his father's death, Isaac lived near Hagar and treated her with respect.[5] What does all this mean? We can only speculate. But if the silences mean something, they suggest that even an arrested sacrifice still has a victim. Isaac may not have died physically, but the text seems to make him disappear, literally, through three scenes in which his presence was central. He should have been there to greet and be greeted by the two servants on his safe return from Mount Moriah. He should have been there to mourn his departed mother Sarah. He should have been there to at least discuss, with his father and his father's servant, his future wife. Isaac did not die on the mountain, but it seems as if something in him did die, only to be revived when he married. The text tells us that Rebecca "became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

That seems to be the message of the silences. The significance of Beer Lahai Roi seems to be that Isaac never forgot how Hagar and her son – his half-brother Ishmael – had been sent away. The Midrash says that Isaac reunited Hagar with Abraham after Sarah's death. The biblical text tells us that Isaac and Ishmael stood together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). Somehow the divided family was reunited, seemingly at the instigation of Isaac.

If this is so, then Isaac's love for Esau is simply explained. It is as if Isaac had said: I know what Esau is. He is strong, wild, unpredictable, possibly violent. It is impossible that he should be the person entrusted with the covenant and its spiritual demands. But this is my child. I refuse to sacrifice him, as my father almost sacrificed me. I refuse to send him away, as my parents sent Hagar and Ishmael away. My love for my son is unconditional. I do not ignore who or what he is. But I will love him anyway, even if I do not love everything he does – because that is how God loves us, unconditionally, even if He does not love everything we do. I will bless him. I will hold him close. And I believe that one day that love may make him a better person than he might otherwise have been.

In this one act of loving Esau, Isaac redeemed the pain of two of the most difficult moments in his father Abraham's life: the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael and the Binding of Isaac.

I believe that love helps heal both the lover and the loved.

Shabbat Shalom

Shabbat Shalom: Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel — "And they said, we saw indeed that the Lord was with you and we said: let there now be an oath between us, between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you." (Gen. 26:28)

On what basis, and with which types of people, can we make peace treaties? A careful reading of the relationships between Abraham, Isaac and Avimelekh – and especially a study of Parshat Toldot – provides a significant answer to these questions, and contains a crucial message for the government of Israel in our time.

Some background: We first meet Avimelekh in Parshat Vayera, when Abraham wandered over to Gerar, the area where Avimelekh ruled. Gerar was the land of the Philistines, which is part of the Divinely-promised borders of Israel. Abraham referred to Sarah as his sister, and she was immediately taken into Avimelekh's harem – without anyone asking her or her 'brother's' permission [Gen. 20:2].

Clearly, Avimelekh was a lascivious and cruel despot, who certainly would have murdered any husband of Sarah. After he was given a dire warning in a dream sent by God, Avimelekh played the innocent victim, asserting that the fault lies with Abraham since he [Avimelekh] acted 'with purity of heart and innocence of hand' [ibid. 20:5]. Abraham correctly explains: "...there is no fear of God in this place, and I would have been murdered because of my wife' [ibid. 20:11].

Despite Avimelekh's apparent duplicity as a woman-snatcher and well-stealer [ibid. 26:25], Abraham nevertheless makes a treaty with him. Abraham gives him sheep and cattle, as well as seven more ewes as a sign that he dug the well at Be'er Sheva (literally 'the well of the oath'). It is remarkable that it is Abraham who does the giving: he receives nothing, although the covenant, the oath, is taken by both of them.

This context brings us to Toldot, where the most important thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history. Now, it is Isaac, Abraham's son, who is forced by famine to go to 'Avimelekh, the King of the Philistines, to Gerar' [ibid. 26:1]. Immediately, the people of the area ask about his wife and – for self-protection – he, too, refers to Rebecca as his sister. We discover that Avimelekh is also a voyeur; he looks into Isaac's window and sees him 'playing' with his wife! Yet again, Avimelekh feigns innocence, calling Isaac the deceiver. 'What is this that you did to us by claiming she was your sister? One of my people almost slept with your wife!' [ibid. 26:10]

Isaac goes on to amass a vast accumulation of wealth, including cattle, sheep and servants. He is still living in Gerar, 'And the Philistines were jealous of him' [ibid. 26:14]. This is the same Avimelekh and these are the same Philistines with whom Abraham made his covenant. Nevertheless, 'the Philistines stopped up all of the wells which were dug by the servants of his father,' and Avimelekh forces Isaac to move away because 'his wealth was amassed from them' [ibid. 26:16]. Isaac leaves, but nevertheless insists upon re-digging the wells of his father which had been destroyed.

To add insult to injury, Isaac now digs two new wells in his new location – only to have the Philistines arguing with him over the ownership of the water. The finale of this incident is difficult to imagine. After all that has transpired, Avimelekh comes to Isaac flanked by his general Pikhol and "ahuzat me-re'ehu" – a group of friends – in order to sign another treaty with him. Isaac is understandably surprised, seeing that they have hated him and exiled him.

The fork-tongued Avimelekh argues, 'we have done only good towards you because we sent you away in peace.' The Philistine king apparently believes that if a Jew is banished – but is permitted to flee with his life intact – the Jew ought be grateful! And, despite Avimelekh's history, Isaac has a feast with him and they swear yet another oath together. Isaac now renames the place Be'er Sheva in honor of this second oath-treaty.

Is the Torah teaching us to continue to make treaties, even though our would-be partners have a history of duplicity and treachery? I believe the very opposite to be the case. 'The actions of the ancestors are

repeated in the lives of their children.’ Unfortunately, Jews are always over-anxious to believe that their enemies have become their friends and the leopard has changed his spots.

Just as Abraham is punished for his treaty with Avimelekh, so is Isaac punished for his treaty with Avimelekh. The Land of Israel is too important – and the preservation of a Jewish future is too vulnerable – for us to take risks and make treaties with unconscionable and dishonest rulers. A treaty is only possible when it is made with a partner who, like us, lives in awe of God.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos

The Challenge of Defying Natural Instincts

One of the incidents in the Torah that I always have difficulty with is the incident of Yaakov “stealing” the brachos (blessings) from Eisav. The Patriarch Yaakov, who personifies the Attribute of Truth (“Give Truth to Yaakov” (Micha 7:20)), engages in a ruse—a canard—to take the brachos away from his older brother. As much as Rashi tries to parse for us the pasuk “I am Eisav your first born” (anochi Eisav bechorecha) (Bereshis 27:19) to read as if it were saying “(It is) I; Eisav is your first born”, it is hard to believe that this is really how Yaakov was responding to Yitzchak’s question, “Who are you, my son?” (Bereshis 27:18).

The Gemara in (Makkos 24a), which discusses the paradigm of the honest person, is even more troubling. The Gemara there says that the pasuk “Who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his fellow no evil...” (Tehillim 15:3) refers to our patriarch Yaakov, as it is written, “Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver” (Bereshis 27:12). In addition, the Gemara in Sanhedrin (92a) says “whoever disguises his speech (so that he should not be recognized) it is considered as if he worships idols” (for the same word used by Yaakov in connection with his fear of being ‘caught’ is used elsewhere in reference to idol worship).

Clearly, Yaakov Avinu was very reluctant to do this. Rashi says there in Makkos, “He originally did not want to lie for he said ‘Perhaps my father will feel me’, but his mother forced him into it—and it was based on the Divine Word.” This Rashi contains somewhat of a novelty. We all know that Rivka forced him to do this, but Rashi is telling us that Rivka delivered a prophetic message to her son. She took him aside and said, “Yaakov, dear, I am telling you that the Ribono shel Olam said you need to do this!” Yaakov thus had no choice. He had to do it. Had it only been on his mother’s say so, I do not know if he would have done it, but it was “Al pi haDibur” (based on the Word of G-d). So says Rashi.

This leads to the following question: The Ribono shel Olam wanted Yaakov to receive the brachos. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks, was the Ribono shel Olam unable to figure out another way for Yaakov to receive the brachos? Did it need to come about through deceit? The person who is the personification of Truth—for whom deception is as abhorrent as idol worship—needed to disguise himself and in effect lie to his father? Couldn’t Hashem have arranged this to happen through a less spiritually offensive scenario? What is the meaning of this??

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky constructs a beautiful Torah thought to address this issue:

Each of the patriarchs symbolized a certain attribute. Avraham’s attribute was Chessed (Kindness). He was the personification of Chessed. He preached Chessed. He looked at the world and saw the Creation as a reflection of the Chessed of the Almighty. He made his mission in life the emulation of the Chessed of the Ribono shel Olam. This is how he brought people under the wings of the Divine Presence.

If you look at the nisyonos (tests) of Avraham Avinu, so many of them involved lack of Chessed. One of his first tests was leaving his father’s home. What kind of a Baal Chessed leaves his father? He is in effect commanded to NOT BE a Baal Chessed. It must have hurt Avraham Avinu. It ran against his nature to abandon his father. What kind of nice person does that?

Another test involved sending away his wife Hagar. He objected when Sarah told him to do it, but Hashem insisted that he listen to Sarah. Here

too we have a command that ran against his nature, his attribute of Chessed.

Of course, at top of the pyramid was Akeidas Yitzchak (the “Binding” of Yitzchak). Not only is slaughtering one’s own son an act of cruelty, but in the context of Avraham’s life—for years and years he preached about an Almighty of Kindness and an Almighty of Love—he is asked to do exactly what he has been urging others not to do for all these years. The answer is—this is why it is a test! A test is to overcome one’s natural inclinations and one’s own proclivities.

The Ribono shel Olam was saying to Avraham Avinu, “Avraham, if you REALLY love me and fear me, I want you to engage in these activities that are the hardest for you to do. They go against every grain and sinew in your body.” That is the nisayon—to demonstrate that there is something MORE important to Avraham than just being a Baal Chessed—listening to the Word of the Ribono shel Olam. That is what it is all about.

“Now I know that you fear Elokim and you did not refuse your son from Me” (Bereshis 22:12). That is why there were ten nisyonos by which Avraham was tested (Avot 5:3), to prove that Avraham Avinu would do the very thing that is the most difficult for him to do.

Yaakov Avinu’s attribute was Truth—“Give Truth to Yaakov...” (Micha 7:20) The Ribono shel Olam knows that Yaakov abhors falsehood. Psychologically, he feels that if he is forced to be deceitful “I will be like an idolater.” G-d tested him and said, “I want you to engage in deception because this is for the good of Klal Yisrael.” As painful and as difficult as it was, and as much as it went against every grain in his body, he did it anyway. Of course, the Almighty could have figured out a “better way,” a different way, a less deceitful way. But that would not have been a nisayon! At the end of the day, the test is, what is more important—your natural inclination (to Truth) or listening to Me?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks: We see the nisayon of Avraham Avinu and we see the nisayon of Yaakov (which Rav Kamenetsky aptly calls “Yaakov’s Akeidah”). Where is the nisayon of Yitzchak? Where was Yitzchak’s mettle tested? Don’t tell me it was the “Akeidah” because, on the contrary, that did not go against Yitzchak’s Attribute of Gevurah (Inner Strength), but rather they correlate with each other. Where do we find that Yitzchak was tested in the same way that his father and son were tested—being commanded by G-d to go against the essence of his natural inclination?

Rav Yaakov gives an amazing answer. He cites a Gemara we have quoted in the past, but now we will have a new understanding of this Gemara (Shabbos 89b):

Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rav Yonasan: What is the meaning of that which is written ‘For you are our father, because Avraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us, you Hashem, are our Father—Our Eternal Redeemer is your name.’ (Yeshaya 63:16)?

At a future time, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will say to Avraham: Your children have sinned against Me. Avraham will reply before Him: Master of the Universe, let them be obliterated for the sanctity of Your Name! (Unsatisfied with this reply) Hashem will say (to Himself) I will speak rather to Yaakov since he experienced pain in raising his children. Perhaps he will ask Me to have mercy upon them. So Hashem will say to Yaakov, ‘Your children have sinned against Me.’ Yaakov will reply before Him: Master of the Universe, let them be obliterated for the sanctity of Your Name! Hashem will say: There is neither reason among the elders nor counsel among the youth!

So Hashem will say to Yitzchak, ‘Your children have sinned against Me.’ Yitzchak will say before Him: Master of the Universe, my children and not Your children?! When they preceded the statement ‘we will do’ to the statement ‘we will hear’ before You, You called them ‘My son, My firstborn’. Now, you tell me that they are my children and not Your children? Furthermore, how much after all, could they have sinned? How many are a man’s years? Seventy years. Take away the first twenty, since You do not punish a person for them. There are fifty years left. Take away twenty-five, which are nights. There are twenty-five left. Take away twelve and a half, which are spent praying, eating or in the

bathroom. There are only twelve and a half years of potential sin left. If You will shoulder them all, fine. And if not, then half should be on me and half on You...

This Gemara always bothered us. This is Yitzchak? Yitzchak whose attribute was Justice! Yitzchak, who is known as the Pachad Yitzchak (the "fearful Yitzchak" who was always afraid of sin and its punishment)? This is Yitzchak who lived by the motto of the immutability of law—"Let the law pierce the mountain!"? He, of all the patriarchs, is defending Klal Yisrael and saying, "What's the problem that they sinned a bit?"

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says an amazing insight: This is Yitzchak's "Akeidah"! It is here that he is being challenged to go against his base instincts and his natural inclination. This is where he needs to say "I am NOT going to invoke Din (Judgement). I am not going to 'go by the book'. I am not going to say they are accountable." Here Yitzchak pleads: "Have mercy on them," because that was the Almighty's challenge to him!

The ability to defend Klal Yisrael despite the fact that they are guilty was the nisayon the Almighty placed before Yitzchak. When Klal Yisrael will need this defense, in the End of Days—that is when Yitzchak will have his "Akeida"—the test of his ability to meet the challenge of going counter to his natural instincts.

The bottom line from the above analysis is that everyone has his own "Akeida". How do we know which is our personal "Akeida"? The Vilna Gaon writes in Sefer Yonah that most of us (if not virtually all of us) are 'Gilgulim' (transmigrated souls). Our neshamos (souls) have been here before. The reason we are back here again is because our souls were sent to this world to accomplish a certain task, to behave a certain way, and we failed the first time around. Therefore, neshamos need to come back a second and sometimes a third time in order to correct that which they failed to correct the first time(s).

How does one know what to correct? Both the Vilna Gaon and Rav Tzadok say that that which you have difficulty with—that is what you need to correct! If a person has a tendency towards anger, he is a quick-tempered person—that is his nisayon! That, then, is what he is challenged to work on. Another person may find it difficult to part with money. It is hard for him to write a check. That is what he needs to work on. A third person may find it difficult to sit and spend time learning. That is what he has to work on.

This is how the Vilna Gaon interprets the Gemara: "It would have been easier for man to have never been created than to have been created; now that he was created let him examine his actions" (Eiruvim 13b). This means that now that you are back here for a second time, examine your ways (and see where your challenges are). Rav Tzadok says the same thing. "So too Chazal expound the pasuk, 'Repent Israel to Hashem your G-d for you have failed in your sins' (Hoshea 14:2). From the failures that a person sees in his ways, from the places he has stumbled, he can detect those areas where he has not yet purified himself in the depths of his heart."

This is the takeaway message. All of us in this world need to look for our Akeida. What thing is the most difficult for us to do properly? The area that we find the most difficult is the area where we need to overcome our tendency to do the opposite—just like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov all did (or will do). That will, G-d willing, allow us to achieve a "tikun" (correction) for our souls so that we will be able (following death) to remain in the World of the Souls eternally.

Psalm 111: The Divine in the Details Rav Kook Torah

In chapter 111, the psalmist expresses his wonder at the magnificence of God's works - both in the realm of nature and in the Torah. This appreciation for the details in God's works was the focal point for a third-century debate between Rabbi Abahu and an unnamed heretic.

The Heretic's Challenge

The Talmud (Berachot 10a) recounts that a heretic once questioned Rabbi Abahu about the order of chapters in the book of Psalms. Why, he asked, does the third chapter refer to the rebellion of Absalom, while chapter 57 speaks of David hiding from Saul - an event that occurred many years before Absalom's rebellion?

This was not an innocent query. The heretic believed that there is no real order to the chapters, and the arrangement is happenstance. While the overall prophetic message may be Divinely inspired, the details are arbitrary and lack significance. In other words, the heretic was throwing down the gauntlet and challenging the very heart of rabbinic tradition. He denied the validity of making deductions from details in the text of the Torah. In this way, he sought to undermine the entire process of applying hermeneutic rules to derive laws and moral teachings.

Deriving Meaning from Juxtaposition

Rabbi Abahu agreed that this question is indeed difficult for those who require a chronological order in the text. But for us, he retorted, this question poses no difficulty. We also look for contextual inferences. This is a method of textual interpretation called semuchim.

In this particular case, Absalom's rebellion is mentioned in chapter three of Psalms in order to connect it to the subject matter of the second chapter - the future rebellion of Gog and Magog.

Rabbi Abahu closed his argument by noting that the concept of semuchim is already mentioned in the Torah, as it says, "Steadfast (semuchim) forever, they are made in truth and uprightness" (Psalms 111:8).

Yet his proof-text appears artificial. The word semuchim in the verse refers to the steadfast and eternal nature of mitzvot, not to the method of textual exegesis called semuchim!

Purpose in the Details of Creation

When we examine the characteristics of living creatures, we find that each detail - the aerodynamics of a butterfly's wing, the speed and stickiness of a chameleon's tongue - displays wisdom and purpose, rather than chance and randomness. This is true for the entire gamut of life in the world, from the basic needs of an amoeba to the complex lives of humans.

This perception is even more valid regarding that which humanity requires to develop, both morally and spiritually. These catalysts for growth are infinitely more significant than those aspects that satisfy our natural - i.e., physical and intellectual - needs.

In short, any mechanism that furthers our ethical advance is a product of Divine wisdom. God provided us with these means so that we may realize our full potential.

The primary vehicle for mankind's spiritual growth is the Torah and the prophetic writings. These writings are a beacon of light, establishing the foundations of morality and justice for all peoples. It is far-fetched to suggest that such a critical instrument for humanity's advance is merely a matter of chance, even with regard to its minor aspects and details.

Design in the Details

We may now better understand Rabbi Abahu's proof from Psalm 111:

“וְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַחֲמֵי יְהוָה; לְעוֹלָם לְעֶד מְרוֹכְבֵי. פְּקוּדוֹתַי לֹךְ נִצְמָנִים; וּמִשְׁפַּט אֱמֶת תְּדַוּ מִעֲשֵׂי.” (תהילים ק"א:ז-ח)

“The works of His hands are truth and justice; all of His precepts are faithful. They are steadfast forever; they are fashioned in truth and uprightness.” (v. 7-8)

The psalmist speaks of both nature and God's precepts. He compares the "truth" - the design and purpose - that is evident in nature with the truth to be uncovered in the Torah.

The detailed workings of creation reflect Divine order and purpose. "The works of His hands are truth and justice." We should recognize that this same quality applies to the Torah - "all of His precepts are faithful" - since the Torah's precepts promote the development of our moral and spiritual character.

"They are steadfast (semuchim) forever." The writings of the Torah rely securely (somchim) on the pillars of Divine wisdom that nurtures humanity's advance and enlightenment. If Divine providence is discernible even in the smallest and most insignificant of creatures, then certainly we should expect it will be found in that which gives meaning and purpose to humanity, the crown of creation.

Thus we may be confident in the validity of lessons derived from textual analysis, such as semichut of adjacent texts, as this order was intended for our spiritual benefit. The words of the Torah are "fashioned in truth."

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Strength, Patience, and Hope Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

When I was a young boy, I had two distinct images of a strong man. One was of Charles Atlas. Do you remember him? If you do, you are no longer a youngster. Pictures of Charles Atlas appeared on the rear cover of the comic books that I voraciously read as a child. His muscular body was presented as the model of strength, and all of us "97 pound weaklings" were urged to correspond with Mr. Atlas, who, through his "dynamic tension" technique, could make similarly muscular men out of all of us.

The other image was of a man I knew who attended the small synagogue that my father, of blessed memory, frequented every Monday and

Thursday, when the Torah was read. I don't think that anyone in the shul knew the man's real name. Everyone referred to him as "the Shtarker," the Strong Man. I was then no more than eight years old, so to my eyes, he was at least seven feet tall. He was certainly head and shoulders above everyone else in that tiny synagogue. His physical prowess was demonstrated when he lifted the Torah after the Torah reading concluded. He lifted it high and extended his arms so that ten or twelve of the Torah columns were exposed. My memory may deceive me, but I think that no one else in the shul was ever given the honor of lifting the Torah. No one else could compete with the Shtarker's feat.

Over the years, I have come to reflect upon the many "shtarkers" in the Bible. Samson is one obvious candidate for the title. But even kindly Abraham was a warrior, and a victorious one. Jacob was proud of his triumphant use of "my sword and my bow." Moses was able to slay the Egyptian who tormented his Jewish victim. Joshua, Saul, and David were all "shtarkers" who led their people in battle.

One biblical figure stands out as a "non-shtarker," a gentle soul, perhaps even a pacifist. I refer, of course, to Isaac, the hero of the Torah portion we read this week, Parashat Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9). Isaac commits no aggressive acts, however legitimate they might be, and never even asserts himself verbally.

I have long been conscious of the contrast between Isaac and the other major characters of the Bible. But only recently was I made aware of a fascinating problem. It was brought to my attention by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv in his excellent book on the weekly Torah portions, entitled *MiSinai Ba (He Came From Sinai)*. Rabbi Shaviv concurs with my view of Isaac as a decidedly non-militant personality. But he is troubled by the fact that in the Jewish mystical tradition, the trait of *gevurah*, strength, is assigned to Isaac and not to the other Patriarchs. Thus, in Kabbalistic terminology, Abraham represents *chesed*, compassion, and Jacob stands for *tiferet*, harmony. It is gentle Isaac who carries the banner of *gevurah*. How are we to understand this perplexing attribution of strength to that patriarch who seems to least exemplify it?

Rabbi Shaviv answers this dilemma with the following provocative sentence: "Forgoing the military option is itself a show of strength." I can accept his formulation, but I choose to modify it slightly. The way I see it, there are two types of strength. One way is to exert power. Abraham chose that way when he waged war against the four kings in the story we read just a few short weeks ago. Similarly, Joshua and David found that way necessary in their struggles.

But Isaac knew the secret of another way of demonstrating strength. He faced challenges that he could have met aggressively. More than once, he faced hostility. In our parasha, we read of the enmity he confronted at the hands of the Philistines, who stopped up the wells he needed to water his flock. In verses 13-22 of chapter 26, we read "...The Philistines envied him...They stopped up all the wells his father had dug..." What was Isaac's response? Not war! Rather, "Isaac departed..." He left the scene, he dug new wells, but again he faced violent opposition. "The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with him..." They continued to stop his wells. In response, he dug another well and dug yet another well. He persisted, swallowing his pride and suppressing every impulse of striking back violently. Ultimately, he prevailed. Finally, he dug a well which was uncontested.

Some find his patience in the face of his enemies frustrating. But Midrash Tanchuma finds it admirable and remarks: "Behold! See what strength Isaac possessed!" The Midrash validates Rabbi Shaviv's contention that sometimes, "forgoing the military option is itself a show of strength."

There is a verse in the biblical Book of Proverbs which is particularly apt here. It reads, "Better to be forbearing than mighty; to have self-control than to conquer a city." (Proverbs 16:32).

Isaac's method of achieving goals persistently but patiently is again demonstrated in a very different context in this week's Torah portion. We are told that he was forty years old when he married Rebecca, whereas his children were not born until he was sixty. He suffered twenty years of disappointing childlessness. It would have been perfectly appropriate for him to take another wife, or a concubine,

during those twenty years. After all, his father Abraham had done just that, marrying Hagar when Sarah could not bear him a child. Could Isaac not have assumed that Rebecca would have given her consent to such a move, as did his mother Sarah?

Isaac rejected that option. Instead, again patiently and persistently, he chose to pray. He prayed fervently, year after year. The great medieval commentator Rabbi David Kimchi, or Radak, remarks: "He prayed consistently and for a long period of time because he loved Rebecca exceedingly. He did not wish to offend her by taking another wife. Therefore, he persisted in prayer until the Lord answered him."

There are many texts in our tradition that give support to Isaac's way of demonstrating strength. One that particularly intrigues me is this Talmudic statement: "Who is the strongest of the strong? He who transforms his enemy into a friend." This was Isaac's way. He asks us to strive to convert our enemy into a friend.

Another text illustrates that strength is more about patient self-control than physical might. It is found in the Talmudic tractate *Kiddushin* 40a, where the tale is told about a certain Rabbi Zadok, who resists the attempts of a particularly powerful noblewoman to lead him astray. He exerts moral strength, and to him the Talmud applies the following biblical verse: "Bless the Lord, O His angels, mighty creatures who do His bidding, ever obedient to His bidding. Bless the Lord, all His hosts, His servants who do His will." (Psalms 103:20-21)

Isaac's way recognizes the necessity for great patience and forbearance. If we adopt Isaac's way, we must be prepared for a lengthy process before our challenges are resolved. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, words which have been memorialized in a popular song, "An eternal people does not fear the long and arduous path."

Patience is necessary for those who follow Isaac's way. But a wise woman taught us that patience is but another name for hope. That woman was Jane Austen, who put these words into the mouth of one of the characters in her great novel, *Sense and Sensibility*: "Know your own happiness. You want nothing but patience—or give it a more fascinating name: call it hope."

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Toldot

Did you know that on their wedding day, a bride and groom are forgiven for all their sins?

On their wedding day, a bride and groom are forgiven for all their sins. This astonishing teaching in the Talmud *Yerushalmi* is based on a passage in Parshat Toldot. The Torah tells us how Eisav, the twin brother of Yaakov, bought a lot of distress and upset to his parents Yitzchak and Rivka.

The key ways in which he upset them were his choice of wives. In an age when polygamy was the norm, he had already married twice. His wives had come from Hitite tribes and because they had come from a different culture, Eisav's parents were deeply concerned about the negative impact they might have on him and the children they would raise.

Mindful of this, Eisav wanted to find favour in the eyes of his parents. So the third time round he made a calculated move to marry his second cousin Machalat, the daughter of Yishmael. The Talmud highlights the fact that her name, 'Machalat', comes from the same route as 'M'chila' which means forgiveness, indicating that on his wedding day when marrying Machalat, Eisav sought to achieve forgiveness for his sins.

In this very spirit, brides and grooms treat their wedding day as a type of Yom Kippur, they fast and during the amida prayer they include the passage of *vidduy* (confession) just like on Erev Yom Kippur just before the fast starts. It is only under the Chuppah, when they have a sip of wine, that they break their fast.

This is a significant concept. What it means is that on their wedding day, bride and groom can put behind them their own personal private lives up to that point and from their Chuppah onwards they can face the future as one single combined entity starting off on a clean slate.

And where do we learn this from? None other than the 'rasha', that wicked man Eisav. Yet again the Torah comes to teach us how to appreciate every single person. In this spirit, the Ethics of the Fathers teaches us, "Do not despise any person. Who is wise? It is the one who learns from everyone. And also –Every person has his or her hour.

A bride and groom, on the most significant and joyous day of their lives, are reminded that every single Torah character is someone from whom we can learn an enormous amount.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha *Parshas Toldos - Sour Lentils*

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

"I am going to die!"

That is what Esau wailed as he returned home on the afternoon of Abraham's funeral after a rage-filled rampage of murder and promiscuity. Our Sages explain that these acts were a rebellious reaction to the death of his saintly grandfather. The Torah tells us that he returned home, "hungry and exhausted." His brother, Yaakov, understood Esau well and seized the moment. He offered him a steaming bowl of immediate tangible satisfaction, cloaked as hot red lentil soup, in exchange for an intangible piece of spirituality, his birthright. Esau rationalizes. "Behold," he exclaims, "I am going to die so what do I need a birthright for?" (Genesis 25:32) Obviously, Esau had no regard for the birthright or the spiritual ramifications it carried, ie. blessings, priesthood, and most important, the privilege to be the guiding force behind the traditions of his parental lineage.

He agreed to trade it all for a bowl of lentil soup. Amazingly enough, when Jacob claims his allotment and receives the blessings from Isaac, Esau goes into a frenzy. He wants to kill Jacob over something for which he claimed to have had no use.

Where are the roots of this transformation?

Rav Chaim Soleveitchik was once approached by a wealthy man who owned a slaughterhouse. The man asked Rav Chaim to inspect a recently slaughtered steer that was worth a large sum of money. The steer had a questionable infection on its lung that might have rendered it non-kosher. Rav Chaim looked at the animal and shook his head. "Your fears prove true," he said. "I'm sorry but this animal does have a diseased lung and is not kosher." The man accepted the ruling with an open mind and heart. "It's all right Rebbe," he replied, "I can afford to make a sacrifice once in a while."

A month later, the same person appeared before Rav Chaim together with another man. They were arguing about an insignificant sum of money, and the wealthy man insisted that they present their case before the Rabbi. Once again, Rabbi Soleveitchik issued a ruling against the butcher, but this time, however, his reaction was very different. He ranted and raved that the Rav did not know how to adjudicate even a simple question. He threatened the Rabbi and verbally assaulted him. Rabbi Soleveitchik stood silent through the man's tirade, and eventually his children expelled the man from their home.

"Wasn't this the man that revered your judgment regarding the cow? Wasn't his loss in that case almost one hundred times the amount of this particular loss? Why was he so amenable then and so incensed now?" his children asked.

Rav Chaim smiled. "This man is basically a good person. He didn't even mind taking a large loss when I prohibited the sale of the meat. However, today I awarded someone money that he perceived to be his. People are willing to lose for Heaven's sake, but they can not handle the fact that someone is getting what they believe is theirs."

Esau had to make a choice — birthright or soup. He chose soup. The birthright and all its spiritual values held no meaning for him, until his brother reaped the reward. At that moment Esau declared that "the days of my father's mourning shall come soon and I shall kill my brother Jacob." The Torah sums up his frustration exactly the way Rav Chaim explained. "And Esau hated Jacob for the blessings that he (Jacob) received from his father." Esau was not bothered about the blessings that he lost. Esau was bothered about the blessings that Jacob won! Esau was

willing to sell the blessings. When the sale bore the fruit of its ramification, Esau went on a rampage. He was willing to abandon his entire spiritual future for a bowl of soup, as long as no one else would profit. When they did profit however, then things turned very sour. We all should look at the personal and inherent ramifications of our own losses and gains, and not judge ourselves by how someone else fares. We'd all be much happier!

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Steinberg in memory of Irving Berlin

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Toldos

פְּרִשְׁתַּי תּוֹלְדוֹת תְּשֻׁבָה

וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו קְרוֹלוּ וַיִּבֶךְ

And Eisav lifted up his voice and wept. (27:38)

The *Sefarim HaKedoshim* teach that the few drops of tears which Eisav emitted have been the source of much trouble for our people throughout the millennia. In Eisav's mind, Yaakov *Avinu* was the villain who stole his rightful blessings. He was so overwrought with pain at this perceived loss that he expressed emotion. Eisav was not an emotional person. He was a hardened criminal, but even criminals have feelings. These tears have stood against us as a prosecuting agent, condemning us and seeking reparation. While no one questions the veracity of the above statement, it still begs elucidation. We have a *halachic* mechanism in which the minority (either through *rove*, majority; or *miyut*, minority); or *bateil b'shishim*, nullification when one entity is sixty times more than its counterpart) is nullified by the majority. This is called *bitul*, nullification. Surely, our People have cried torrents of tears throughout the years. We have suffered countless travail. We have before us two sets of tears: Eisav's tears; and the tears of Yaakov's descendants. Obviously, our tears should overwhelm and obliterate his tears.

Horav Shmelke, zl, m'Nikolsburg, resolves this based upon the *halachic* axiom, *min b'mino ein bateil*, two like-tasting ingredients do not nullify one another. Thus, Eisav wept over his loss of *olam hazeh*, this world, with its materialistic and physical pleasures. We, too, weep over the pain generated as a result of the bitter exile in which we find ourselves. The physical and emotional trauma caused by our persecutors has wreaked havoc on our lives. This is why we cry. If we focus our tears on the exile of the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, on the *Bais HaMikdash* that is no longer extant, then our tears would be *b'sheino mino*, different than those of Eisav. Under such circumstances, our tears would nullify Eisav's tears.

The *dvar* Torah teaches us an important lesson: We cry for the wrong things. We cry for our personal pain. We ignore Hashem's pain. Furthermore, there is a spiritual component to everything that we do, and, likewise, for everything that we ask. We ask for a livelihood, for what purpose? So that we may live in luxury, go on vacations, keep up with the neighbors, or because we want to have more time to learn, support those in need, give our children more opportunity for spiritual growth? We could go through the gamut of requests and demonstrate that our Heavenly requests lack the spiritual contingency that makes them worthy of overcoming Eisav's tears. The message is clear: For sincere prayer to have prime efficacy, it is vital to have a spiritual focus and objective.

The following two stories are not new. One is well-known. In the past, however, the lesson gleaned from these stories was the significance of sincerity in prayer. I suggest the lesson is spirituality. In both circumstances, the individual who prayed focused on spiritual ascendancy as the goal in prayer. It was never about himself; it was always about Hashem. Perhaps this is the meaning of sincerity.

One day, a *kollel* fellow visited *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*. He brought along his seven year old son who obviously was going through a difficult period in his life. The child had not long before been diagnosed with the dreaded disease and was presently in the midst of taking treatments. "*Rebbe*," the father began, "I would like to share

with the *Rav* what has just taken place concerning our son. My son was diagnosed with the dreaded disease and, as part of his treatment regimen, he was to take a few rounds of heavy chemotherapy. The side effects of the treatment are pain and nausea and eventually losing all of one's body hair.

"My wife and I were heartbroken concerning the pain and suffering our son would experience. Our son, however, announced that if this is Hashem's decree, he is prepared to accept the decree of Divine Strict Justice with great love. He is a *Yid*, and, like the countless *Yidden* before him, he is prepared to endure whatever Hashem sends his way. When he heard about the hair loss, however, he "lost it" and began to cry incessantly. Between the heaving and sobbing, he cried out, 'I don't care about my hair loss, but how can I be without my *payos*? It does not bother me that I will look weird, and that children (like myself) will stare, question and even laugh, but if this is what Hashem asks of me, what can I say? But my precious *payos* are my physical Jewish uniform. This is how a Jewish boy looks. How can I live without my *payos*?'"

The father continued describing how his son cried and prayed (like a veteran), pleading with Hashem to "leave" his *payos*. He related that his son had cried, "Hashem, I accept everything with love. My parents explained to me that every decree that comes from You is filled with the greatest love. I believe this, but please let me keep my *payos*!" I watched my son pray; I heard him plead with the Almighty. I, too, prayed that my son's pleas should not be in vain. *Rebbe!* Look at my *yingele*. Hashem listened! Every hair on his body fell out except for his *payos*. They are as full and long as they were before he began his treatments!"

Rav Chaim called his family to join him in paying tribute to a child who had prayed with sincerity. This has always been considered the lesson of history. When a person prays sincerely from his heart, his prayers penetrate the Heavens and rise up directly to Hashem's Throne. Certainly, this is true. Nothing can compete with – or achieve more than – sincere prayer. I think the lesson of this story, however, is something else. It demonstrates the effect of tears that are emitted for Hashem. This child cried because he wanted to keep his *payos* which represented an integral part of his Jewish appearance. This is how Jewish children in Bnei Brak looked. He wanted to maintain that appearance. So, he cried.

Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan was an illustrious *Chassidic* leader whom Jews from all over turned to for advice and blessing. One week, as he traveled with his small entourage, he realized that it was getting late, so that reaching home before *Shabbos* was not realistic. As a result, he made plans to stop in a nearby village where a certain *Reb* Shimon was a community leader. He would surely see to the arrangements necessary for providing hospitality for him and his students. *Reb* Shimon, the premier *baal tzedakah*, charitable benefactor, of the community was only too happy to serve the holy *Rebbe*.

The excitement in the community was palpable. It was not every day that the community was honored to have such a distinguished guest. The *shul* was filled with all of the members of the community. *Chasid* or not, when such an illustrious Torah giant visits, it is a memorable occasion. After *davening* concluded and the *Rebbe* wished *Gut Shabbos* to the congregants, he left for *Reb* Shimon's home, where, surprisingly, it was the meal that left a lasting impression on him. *Rav* Meir recited *Kiddush* and then *Hamotzi*. He took one bite of the *challah* and declared that he had not eaten such *challah* before. Indeed, the *challah* had the flavor of *Gan Eden*. Apparently, this was not the first time that the *Rav* had tasted *Gan Eden* in the *challah*, but this was an ordinary home in an ordinary small village. Something out of the ordinary was occurring here. *Rav* Meir asked his host who had made the *challah*. *Reb* Shimon proudly replied that his wife baked the *challah* every week. "Could you find out what special ingredient she added which might have given the *challah* such an outstanding taste?" the *Rebbe* asked.

Reb Shimon asked his wife what she had done differently that week. She replied that she had not baked the *challah* that week. Apparently, an orphaned girl had knocked on the door and asked if she could help around the house in order to earn some money to live. *Reb*

Shimon's wife did not really need any work done around the house. She wanted very much to help this young girl, however, so she invited her to bake *challah*, for which she would reimburse her.

The young girl, who was all of eleven years old, was summoned and asked for her *challah* recipe. She replied that she did nothing different from the way she had learned to make *challah* from her mother. She mixed the ingredients, kneaded the dough, rolled it out, braided it and then baked it in the oven. All of this was standard fare; she had added no ingredients.

The girl continued with her description of how her mother, of blessed memory, would prepare the dough. She would take the rolling pin, and during the repetitive motion of rolling out the dough, her mother would sing the tunes of *Hallel*, as is customary. As the girl described this process, she sort of slowed her speech, and, for a pensive moment, seemed distant from the *Rebbe*, as she conjured up memories of her recently departed mother. It was then that the girl added, "While I sang the songs of *Hallel*, I thought of my mother, and I could not help but cry as I braided the *challah*."

The *Rebbe* thanked the girl for her recollection and for the delicious *challah*. He then turned to those gathered around him and said, "I now know why that *challah* had the special taste of *Gan Eden*. Life is far from simple, and, to us as Jews living in *galus*, exile, the painful moments more often outnumber and outweigh the moments of joy that we experience. When a young, innocent girl, however, can transform her tears into the songs of *Hallel*, when her tears can be an accompaniment to the joy that emanates from the *Hallel* prayer, then we have experienced the taste, the unique flavor, of *Gan Eden*!"

This story teaches us that it is possible to elevate personal tears to Heavenly status when one is focused on singing Hashem's praises amidst personal adversity.

והיה כאשר תריד ופרקת עולו מעל צוארך

Yet it shall be that when you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from your neck. (27:40)

The *Chozeh, zl, m'Lublin* observes (in a homiletic interpretation of this *pasuk*) that in some instances, one must close his *Gemorah* and engage in commerce or whatever endeavor is necessary in order for him to earn a livelihood. No one said it was going to be easy, but he should not be happy that he must do this. He would much rather continue learning, but he has to put bread on the table. If, however, his attitude is one of, "Great! I got out of learning. I can finally leave the *bais hamedrash*," if it is one of *v'hayah* (the word *v'hayah* denotes joy), *kaasher tarid*; if one is happy about this change in his lifetime endeavor, then *uparakta olo mei'al tzavarecha*, it is tantamount to one who eschews his yoke/ the yoke of Heaven from upon himself. It shows that he has been looking forward to this moment for some time.

In a similar vein, the *Tiferes Shlomo* distinguishes between the divergent attitudes of Kayin and Hevel. The Torah (*Bereishis* 4:2) states, *Vayehi Hevel roeh tzon, v'Kayin hayah oveid adamah*; "And Hevel was a shepherd of sheep and Kayin worked the land." Concerning Hevel, the Torah writes, *va'yehi*; he was compelled to do this; he really did not want this to be his medium of sustenance. Concerning Kayin, however, the Torah writes, *v'hayah*, he was happy; Kayin looked forward to the opportunity that would allow him to leave the *bais hamedrash* to work the soil. It all began with a deficient attitude. Life is comprised of necessary endeavors which, for various reasons, we are compelled to do. While it is important that whatever endeavor one chooses, he should be happy (otherwise he will do poorly and success will be elusive), but not so happy that he counts the minutes until he can leave the *bais hamedrash*. It is what it is, and he must do what he must do, but ... *Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl*, would often reiterate that *B'zeias apecha tochal lechem*, "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" (*Bereishis* 3:19). (Hashem's punishment of Adam for eating of the *Eitz Ha'Daas*, Tree of Knowledge, was meant to be a curse – not a blessing.)

The *Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, m'Sanz*, met a man who seemed quite upset, and his anger was directed against a fellow with whom he had experienced a negative business deal. The diatribe that emerged from his mouth was unbecoming for a Jew against

a brother. Rav Chaim repudiated him for speaking in such a negative manner. The man responded with (the classic), “It is a *mitzvah* to bury such a person.”

Rav Chaim calmly explained to him, “*Klal Yisrael* was given 613 *mitzvos*. You have just come forth to add another *mitzvah* (that of burying this Jew) to the Torah which increases the total to 614, or *tarid* (*taf, reish, yud, daled*). Concerning such action, the Torah intimates (obviously this interpretation is homiletic). *V’hayah kaasher tarid*, “when you add to the original 613 *mitzvos*, you end up, *uparekta olo meia tzavarecha*, “casting off the yoke (of Hashem) from upon your shoulders.” When we attempt to make changes in our immutable Torah, we embolden Eisav and catalyze his reign over us.

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הרב שלמה יעקב בן הרב יהודה אריה ז"ל נפטר ל"ו אלול תשע"ז
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In loving memory of HaRav Shlomo Yaakov Z"l and Rebbetzin Bluma Davis, A"H From the very inception of the Telshé Yeshiva and the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, They were pillars of support and active members of their respective communities. They are sorely missed by their many friends and students.

Rabbi Avrohom and Devorah Shoshana, Yosef and Edie Davis and their families

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A Special Bar Mitzvah Brocha

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

We will shortly see a midrash that describes the childhood of Yaakov and Eisav, and how they went their separate ways after they turned bar mitzvah. Certainly, the most appropriate week to discuss:

Question #1: When?

When does a father recite the brocha “she’petorani”?

Question #2: What?

What does this brocha mean?

Question #3: Why?

Why do we not recite this brocha at a bas mitzvah?

Question #4: Whether?

Does an adoptive father recite this brocha at his son’s bar mitzvah?

Introduction

After a bochur habar mitzvah receives his aliyah to the Torah, his father recites the following passage: Boruch she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh. We will be discussing many questions about this passage, including:

What does it mean?

Is it a brocha or a prayer?

Why does it have such an impersonal text? The brocha does not even say that the bar mitzvah is his child!

Background: With Sheim and Malchus

In the Sefer Maharil, an early and highly respected source for accepted Ashkenazi halachic practice, we find the following:

“When the Maharil’s son turned bar mitzvah and read from the Torah, the Maharil recited a brocha, Boruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam asher petorani mei’onsho shel zeh. Furthermore, we find this brocha in the works of the Mordechai with Sheim and malchus” (Sefer Maharil, Hilchos Kerias HaTorah). Thus, the Maharil rules that there is a regular brocha, including the words Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam (which is referred to as sheim umalchus), that is recited by a father when his son reaches the age of bar mitzvah and demonstrates this by reading from the Torah. It should be noted that although the Maharil attributes this ruling to an early rishon, the Mordechai, this ruling is not found in any extant editions of the Mordechai, although, as we will soon see, we do find it quoted in other authorities of the same era and school.

Some mention a custom that the father should place his hand on his son’s head when he recites the brocha, although I have never seen this in practice (mentioned in the Meshivas Nefesh [Vayikra 9] of R. Yochanan Luria, a prominent posek in fifteenth-century western Germany).

The ruling of the Maharil to recite the brocha of Boruch she’petorani with sheim umalchus is quoted by the Rema in his Darchei Moshe commentary on the Tur (Orach Chayim 225:1), where he adds the following, “However, I did not find this brocha in the Gemara, and I find it difficult to recite a brocha that is not mentioned in the Gemara and in the halachic authorities, although Bereishis Rabbah mentions it at the beginning of parshas Tolados.

Rosh

Presumably, what bothered the Rema is the following statement of the Rosh (Kiddushin 1:41), “We do not find that we recite any brocha that is not mentioned

in the Mishnah, Tosefta, or Gemara.” Thus, the Rema was concerned that the brocha of Boruch she’petorani was never established by Chazal, and reciting it with sheim umalchus constitutes a brocha levatalah, a brocha recited in vain.

Bereishis Rabbah

The Bereishis Rabbah that the Rema quotes says as follows: “And the lads [Yaakov and Eisav] grew up (Bereishis 25:27).” Rabbi Levi explained, “this can be compared to a hadas and a thorn bush that grew next to one another. Once they grew and blossomed, the hadas provided its beautiful fragrance and the thorn bush produced its thorns. Similarly, for thirteen years, both lads went to yeshivah and came home from yeshivah. After they turned thirteen, one went to batei midrash and the other went to houses of idolatry.” Rabbi Elazar explained, “A person is obligated to work with his son until he turns thirteen years old. After that time, he should declare, “Boruch she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh”” (Bereishis Rabbah ad loc.).

Commentaries on Shulchan Aruch

In his glosses to the Shulchan Aruch, the Rema alludes to what he wrote in his Darchei Moshe commentary on the Tur and reaches the same conclusion: “Some say that when one’s son turns bar mitzvah, he should recite Boruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh, but it is better to recite it without sheim umalchus” (Orach Chayim 225:2). We should note that I found no reference to this brocha in any Sefardic authorities, until the very late poskim. All the discussion about reciting it, and whether it should be a full brocha with sheim umalchus, I found only among the Ashkenazic authorities.

The Rema’s conclusion that Boruch she’petorani should be recited without sheim umalchus is followed by most, but not all, subsequent halachic authorities, including the Derisha, Levush, Tosafos Yom Tov (in his Divrei Chamudos commentary on the Rosh, Brochos 9:30), Shelah, Magen Avraham, Mishnah Berurah, and the Kaf Hachayim. The Kaf Hachayim, a very late authority who quotes many Ashkenazic sources, is the first Sefardic authority that I saw who makes any reference at all to the brocha of Boruch she’petorani.

(In the standard, older editions of the Derisha, his comments on this topic were omitted by the publisher, since the Derisha there merely quoted the comments of the Darchei Moshe written by his rebbe, the Rema. However, the Shelah had this quotation in his edition of the Derisha, and it is published in the newer editions of the Tur.)

With sheim umalchus

Thus far, I have quoted predominantly the majority who rule that Boruch she’petorani should be recited without sheim umalchus – in other words, not as a real brocha. However, there are several major authorities who rule that one must recite this brocha with sheim umalchus. In their opinion, since a brocha must include sheim umalchus, reciting this brocha without sheim umalchus does not fulfill the requirement. The Gra, in his comments to the Rema on Shulchan Aruch, simply states that the decision of the Maharil to recite the brocha with sheim umalchus is correct. This approach is subsequently quoted as the primary opinion by both the Chayei Odom (Klal 65:3) and the Aruch Hashulchan. The Chayei Odom rules very directly, “One whose son turns bar mitzvah, when he reads the Torah for the first time, he [the father] should recite the following brocha, Boruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam asher petorani mei’onsho shel zeh.” He then reviews the discussion of the Rema, adding the following points:

Although the Bereishis Rabbah does not state explicitly that one should recite the brocha with sheim umalchus, the Gemara uses the same abbreviated wording when it means that one should recite a regular brocha with sheim umalchus.

The Chayei Odom then refers to a discussion in which the Maharil ruled that we are not to introduce brochos that are not mentioned in the Gemara, and notes that this includes only brochos that are not mentioned in midrashim, either. However, a brocha that is mentioned in a midrash is halachically valid. The Chayei Odom completes his discussion by noting that his own halachic conclusion (in Klal 8:1) was that reciting a brocha in vain is only a rabbinic prohibition. Therefore, he concludes that once the Maharil and the Gra both rule that Boruch she’petorani should be considered a regular brocha, and we have a source for it in a midrash, then hamevoreich lo hifsid – one who recites it as a regular brocha does not lose. He notes that this is despite the fact that the prevalent custom follows the Rema. Even if Chazal never introduced such a brocha, reciting it would constitute only a rabbinic violation, and one may rely on the many opinions who rule that this brocha does exist (safek derabbanan lehakeil).

It is interesting to note that the Aruch Hashulchan, who usually follows accepted custom even when it appears to run against halachic literature, also rules to recite Boruch she’petorani with sheim umalchus. In other words, he agrees with the position of the Maharil, Gra and Chayei Odom, even though the general custom is not to follow that approach.

As mentioned above, the Maharil notes that he found this practice recorded in the Mordechai. We do not have this in our editions of the Mordechai, but obviously it was in the Maharil’s edition. Furthermore, we do have this practice mentioned in other sources from the same era and area. For example, the Tashbeitz Koton, who

lived in the same place and time as the Mordechai (13th century Germany), writes the following: “In Bereishis Rabbah it says that a person should work with his son until he turns thirteen. Afterward, he is required to recite Boruch Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha’olam she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh (Tashbeitz Koton #390).”

Early disputants

On the other hand, there are other rishonim who believe that Boruch she’petorani should not be treated as a regular brocha. For example, Rabbeinu Yehonoson, a talmid of the Raavad, cites the text of the brocha as Boruch Hamakom she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh, which, clearly, avoids reciting Hashem’s Name as one does in a brocha (notes to Rif, Shabbos 55b). We should note that this is not from an Ashkenazic source, but from Provence. Although today Provence is often referred to as an area that followed Sefardic custom, that is not truly accurate. Provence, the area of southern France that borders on the Mediterranean Sea, was at the time of the rishonim an area that had its own minhagim, neither Sefardic nor Ashkenazic. It had absorbed from the traditions and authorities of both areas, yet had developed independently. For example, they began recital of ve’sein tal umatar on the 7th of Marcheshvan, which follows neither Sefardic nor Ashkenazic practice in chutz la’arezt.

What does the brocha mean?

Until this point, I have carefully avoided translating and explaining the words of Boruch she’petorani. An early posek, the Levush, upon recording the halachic discussion germane to the brocha of Boruch she’petorani, states the following: “The text of this brocha is not clear, since one who continues in the evil ways of his ancestors can be punished for their misdeeds for several generations, as the Torah states, pokeid avon avos al banim al shileishim ve’al ribei’im – that Hashem will remember the sins of someone who performed evil to four generations, if the descendants continue the nefarious practices of their antecedents.”

Apparently, the Levush understood the brocha to mean that the son is now exempt from the sins of his father. This means that until bar mitzvah, what happens to the son is because of the father’s misdeeds, and that, therefore, the father will be punished for harm that he caused to the son. This is based on the Gemara (Shabbos 149b) that a person is responsible for punishment that he caused to someone else. It is also borne out by a statement in a midrash, concerning the deaths of Machlon and Kilyon, Naomi’s sons, “Rav Chiya bar Abba said: ‘Until a child turns thirteen, the son is punished for the sins of his father; afterward, he is punished for his own sins.’”

Challenges to the Levush

The Tosafos Yom Tov, in his commentary to the Rosh (Divrei Chamudos 9:30), reviews much of the above material and then challenges the Levush’s approach to explaining the brocha. He writes, “This approach [of the Levush] is forced and difficult to reconcile with the words of the brocha. The intention of the brocha is that, until now, the father was responsible to educate his child in mitzvos and to have him grow in Torah. If the father did not fulfill his responsibility, he will be punished for this. Now that the son has become bar mitzvah, the responsibilities fall on the son himself, and the father will no longer be punished.” This approach is also recorded by the Magen Avraham.

When should the brocha be recited?

The Maharil mentions reciting the brocha when the son receives his first aliyah. The authorities explain this to mean that he performs a mitzvah activity that a child cannot perform (Divrei Chamudos; Magen Avraham). Thus, they rule that if the son led the services (davened in front of the amud), the father should already recite the brocha at that time, since a child cannot fulfill this mitzvah. One may also argue that a father should not recite it when his son has been called up to maftir and read only the maftir and the haftarah, since these activities can be performed by a minor – a topic that we will need to address a different time. However, if the son read a different part of the parsha, and certainly, if he read the entire parsha, the father can recite Boruch she’petorani then.

Under which category of brochos does this fit?

We know that we have birchos hanehenin – brochos of benefit, including the brochos we recite before and after eating and the brochos before we smell certain fragrances. We also have brochos of praise, which include brochos upon seeing or otherwise experiencing wondrous creations of Hashem, such as the brochos recited when one sees the sea, sees something unusual, hears thunder, or witnesses lightning. And we have brochos of prayer, such as davening, tefilas haderech, and some of the brochos of sheva brochos. Under which heading does the brocha of Boruch she’petorani fit?

From the way the halachic authorities discuss it, it appears that it should be categorized under the heading of brochos of praise.

Why no malchus?

When the Rema ruled that one should not recite the name of Hashem when reciting Boruch she’petorani because he was concerned that it might be a brocha levatalah, why didn’t he suggest the following text: Boruch Atah Melech Ha’olam she’petorani mei’onsho shel zeh? Since one is not reciting the words Hashem and Elokeinu, there is no question about reciting a brocha levatalah, yet one is reciting a text closer to the brocha advocated by the Maharil, and this text includes the concept of malchus.

Indeed, this question can be asked on the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 218:9, in a different context. There, the Shulchan Aruch discusses someone reciting a brocha on a personal miracle that he has experienced, and it states as follows: “Some say that one should not recite this brocha unless it was a miracle that was beyond what usually happens in the world; but on a miracle that is within natural experience, such as, he was endangered by thieves at night and saved, or something similar, he is not required to recite a brocha. There are other authorities – who disagree with this [and require a brocha in this instance also]. Therefore, it is proper to recite this brocha without sheim umalchus.” The question to be asked on this ruling of the Shulchan Aruch is that there would be no question of brocha levatalah should one recite the brocha with the words Melech Ha’olam, so why does he omit them?

Rav Yosef Chayim Sonnenfeld answers that one does not recite Melech Ha’olam in these situations so that people will not think that someone fulfills a brocha by reciting Melech Ha’olam without reciting Hashem’s Name and Elokeinu (Shu”t Salmas Chayim, Orach Chayim #197).

Why an impersonal brocha?

Why did Chazal institute such an impersonal wording for this brocha, which makes no reference to the fact that the child is his son? I found this question in the sefer Alei Tamar, authored by Rav Yissochoer Tamar, an eastern European rav who moved to Eretz Yisroel in 1933, where he became a rav in Tel Aviv. He suggests the following: The father is reciting a brocha that he is thankful that he is no longer responsible for his son’s sins (if we explain the brocha according to the Tosafos Yom Tov and the Magen Avraham). This implies that he thinks that his son will sin, certainly not something he wants to advertise in his role as father.

Daughters?

Why don’t we recite Boruch she’petorani when a daughter turns bas mitzvah? This question is raised by some of the later poskim, and I found two quite variant answers. The Pri Megodim explains that since min haTorah a father has the ability to marry off his daughter, in which case he would no longer be responsible for her education and not be punished for her aveiros, Chazal did not institute a brocha (Eishel Avraham 225:5). Explained in other terms, a father recites this brocha when he is no longer responsible for his son’s sins, because he has no other way of avoiding this responsibility, whereas he has a technical way to avoid responsibility for his daughter’s sins.

The Kaf Hachayim (225:15) provides a different answer to this question, which looks at the topic from almost the opposite angle. Since a daughter usually remains living in the home of her birth family until she marries, a father remains responsible for her, even after she becomes an adult. Therefore, reciting this brocha at her bas mitzvah would be premature.

One could perhaps suggest a third answer: Although a son who reads the Torah, receives an aliyah to the Torah, or leads the services has publicly demonstrated that he is now an adult, what equivalent action does a daughter perform at which we would expect her father to recite Boruch she’petorani?

Adoptive father

And now, for our last question: Does an adoptive father recite this brocha at his son’s bar mitzvah? Rav Yitzchok Silberstein, in his sefer Chashukei Chemed, rules that an adoptive father is not responsible for his son’s aveiros, and, therefore, does not recite the brocha of Boruch she’petorani.

Conclusion

The father gets up to announce that he realizes the scope of his responsibility. Delving into the details of this brocha make us realize that raising a child to be G-d fearing is a serious task, incumbent on all those who are blessed with children. There are many factors that interplay in the raising of a child, especially in our age, but this brocha reminds us of our responsibility to do our best to imbue our children with a knowledge and love of Hashem and His Torah and mitzvos.

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה