



Wembley Synagogue

תולדות

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Toldot

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אֲבִרְהֵם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק - *And these are the descendants of Yitzchak, son of Avraham, Avraham fathered Yitzchak* ((25:19)

We would expect the names of Yitzchak's offspring to appear immediately after this introductory verse. Yet what follows is not a list of names, but a description of Yitzchak's marriage to Rivkah, her childlessness etc. The names of his children don't appear until verses 25 and 26. Ramban explains "scripture says and these are the descendants of Yitzchak, son of Avraham, in reference to his sons Eisav and Yaakov who are mentioned below and scripture mentions how their birth came about.

אֲבִרְהֵם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק - *Avraham fathered Yitzchak* – since scripture's declared intention is to record the descendants of Yitzchak, why does it unexpectedly insert this mention of his parentage? Ramban discusses the question beginning with the answers given by his predecessors. The following is a quote from Rashi "since the verse wrote Yitzchak the son Avraham, it had to say Avraham begot Yitzchak for the cynics of the generation were saying "Sarah became pregnant from Avimelech" and therefore Hashem fashioned Yitzchak's face to resemble that of Avraham so that everyone would say, "Avraham fathered Yitzchak."

Ibn Ezra says further that the meaning of הוֹלִיד - here is not "begot" rather it is "raised and brought up" thus the verse means Avraham raised Yitzchak. Ramban now presents his own explanation and says "the most likely explanation in my view is that scripture now goes back one generation, beginning Yitzchak's genealogy with Avraham, the father of the lineage. For it is the custom of scripture in tracing the genealogy of people of great stature to go back to the progenitor of the lineage." (Source: Ramban – Mesorah Publications)

וַיַּעֲבֹר יִצְחָק לְה' לְנִכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא וַיַּעֲבֹר לוֹ ה' וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ *entreated G-d opposite his wife because she was barren, and G-d accepted his prayers, and Rivkah his wife conceived.*" (25:21)

Why does the *pasuk* at first refer to "his wife" without mentioning her name, only to conclude "Rivkah, his wife?"

Yitzchak's mother Sarah was barren for many years. It was only after her name was changed from "Sarai" to "Sarah" that she was able to give birth. Had her name remained "Sarai," she would never have been able to conceive. Yitzchak wondered, "Maybe my wife Rivkah has the same problem as my mother Sara." Therefore, when he prayed to Hashem, he pleaded "Please help my wife to have a child," without mentioning her name. In response to his prayers, Hashem made a miracle greater than the one He made for his mother. Not only did his barren wife become pregnant, but she retained her original name Rivkah. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיַּעֲבֹר יִצְחָק לְה' לְנִכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא - *And Yitzchak entreated G-d opposite his wife because she was barren* (25:21)

The Gemara asks why the great Matriarchs, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah all needed Hashem's miraculous intervention in order to give birth. Why couldn't Hashem have made them able to bear children naturally? The Gemara answers that הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מִתְאַוֶּה לְתַפְלֵתוֹ שֶׁל צְדִיקִים Hashem "craves" as it were, the *tefillot* of the righteous. Michtav MeEliyahu (Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler 1892-1953) explains that *tefilla* is not merely a means for asking Hashem to grant us our needs. Through *tefilla*, a Jew develops a true closeness with Hashem. (Source: Living the Parsha)

Rather than tell us that Rivkah did not have children and that her barrenness ultimately led to Yitzchak's prayer on her behalf, the Torah first mentions the prayer and only afterwards its catalyst. We would have expected the opposite. This change in order is in line with the idea expressed by the Rabbis mentioned above that Hashem craves the prayers of the righteous, and therefore provides them with reason to pray. In our case, the reason to pray would be Rivka's childlessness. The order of the verse hints at this idea – that the purpose of the barrenness was to inspire Yitzchak prayer rather than the other way round. (Source: Rabbi Alpert on the Sidrah)

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנִי וַתֵּלֶךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת ה'

The children struggled inside her. She said "If (the pain of the pregnancy is) so (much) why did I (want to be like) this? She went (to the Yeshiva of Shem) to ask Hashem (what was going to happen to her) (25: 22)

Why did the children struggle inside her? Rashi says that when she passed by the entrances of the Yeshivot of Shem and Ever, Yaakov would run and struggle to come out. When she passed the entrance of a temple of idolatry, Eisav would run and struggle to come out.

How did Rivkah ask Hashem about her pregnancy? Rashi says that she went to the Yeshiva of Shem; Shem revealed to her what would happen through Divine inspiration.

The commentators ask why would Rivkah have gone to ask Shem rather than asking either her husband Yitzchak or her Father-in-Law Avraham? The Tur Ha'Aruch suggests that perhaps she did not wish to distress Avraham with the bad news that she was having a difficult pregnancy.

It is possible that she asked them both but they did not provide her with an explanation and therefore she went to Shem or perhaps she did not want to mention it to Yitzchak or Avraham so as not to cause them distress. For, after so many years of waiting for Rivka to become pregnant, Yitzchak and Avraham would surely have been upset to hear that "the children struggled inside her" causing her such distress.

In fact, for Yitzchak and Avraham, this state of affairs would have been particularly distressing, because it would have been reminiscent of the Akeida (binding of Yitzchak) where, after finally being given a son, Avraham was asked to slaughter him. So too here, after many years of praying for Rivkah to become pregnant, Yitzchak and Avraham would surely be devastated to hear that Rivkah was suffering from such a difficult pregnancy. So in order to save Yitzchak and Avraham from a challenge of faith resembling the Akeida, Rivkah sought the advice of Shem instead. (Source: Sichas Shabbos Parshas Toldos (Lubavitcher Rebbe) 5748)

וַיִּגַּשׁ יַעֲקֹב..... וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֵּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב וְהִיָּדִים יְדֵי עֵשָׂו וְלֹא הִכִּירוּ כִּי הֵיוּ תְּדִי

וַיִּבְרַכְהוּ - And Jacob approached (his father Yitzchak and he felt him), and he said "the voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav." And he didn't recognize him, for his hands were very hairy like the hands of his brother, Eisav, and he blessed him. (27:22-23)

This passage is very puzzling. Yitzchak was presented with conflicting evidence as to the identity of his visitor. The voice indicated that it was Yaakov, and the hands, Eisav. Obviously, something was amiss. And yet the Torah does not mention any further investigation on Yitzchak's part. He simply proceeded to give the blessing. How did Yaakov make his determination that it was Eisav and not Yaakov?

The Beit Halevi (Yosef Dov Soloveitchik 1820-1892) suggests that Eisav suspected Yaakov might try to deceive Yitzchak by disguising himself as Eisav and mimicking his voice. Indeed, the Ramban writes that Yaakov's sole concern was that he would be discovered should Yitzchak pat his hands. He was not worried his voice giving him away, for he was expert at mimicking Eisav's voice. In anticipation, Eisav devised a counter plan. He informed his father Yitzchak that he would mimic Yaakov. This would be a sign that he was indeed Eisav. Yaakov would be speaking in Eisav's voice to perpetrate his deception, but he, Eisav would outsmart him by adopting Yaakov's voice and mannerisms and speaking softly.

Yaakov, knowing the way Eisav's mind worked, decided to turn the tables on him. He would speak in his own voice, with the result that Yitzchak would assume that it was Eisav who had come to him, as prearranged.

This is indeed what happened. When Yaakov came in, and Yitzchak heard Yaakov's voice, then the first sign for his being Eisav was validated. Then he patted his hands and ascertained that they were hairy, thus validating the second sign as well. There could no longer be any question in the matter. The man before him was definitely Eisav, and he proceeded to give him the blessing (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

Eisav and the mitzvah of honouring parents

The Rabbis teach that although Eisav was wicked, there was one thing that he did extremely well. His performance of Kibbud Av Va'eim (honouring parents) was exemplary. The Midrash Rabbah records that Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, bemoaned the fact that although he served his father his entire life, his actions did not measure up to what Eisav did for Yitzchak, his father. "When I served my father, I served him in my regular, dirty clothes; but when I went out in public, I would wear clean clothing. However, Eisav would only serve his father wearing royal clothing as if he was serving a king..." Rav Shimon ben Gamliel was complaining about his inability to serve his father properly. The Succat David asks a simple question: there was an easy solution -- Rav Shimon ben Gamliel should have simply worn his good clothing when he served his father! The answer is that Rav Shimon ben Gamliel was not bemoaning his inability to wear good clothing. He was bemoaning the attitude difference between Eisav and himself. He certainly could have worn good clothing, but that would have been an insincere act. Eisav wore royal clothing for his father because he sensed that he was dealing with a king when he dealt with his father. Rav Shimon ben Gamliel was not grumbling about the fact that he was missing the clothing - he regretted the fact that he was missing the sensitivity and emotion that Eisav felt for Yitzchak.

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 3.46pm



Shabbat ends: 4.52pm