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## A mother's undying love

This week's Parsha is Toldos.

I remember hearing that the Vilna Gaon was asked as a child where in the Torah the name of a patriarch is said twice in a row. The first time is Avraham Avraham in Vayeira at the Akeida when the angel calls out to Avraham. The second time is at the beginning of this week's parsha:

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן-אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק:

In the reading we must pause to ensure both times the name are enunciated clearly. Rashi explains that the reason for the superfluous writing is to point out that Yitzchak was born to Avraham and Sarah after their name changes. As well, to ensure people don't mock Avraham by saying that Yitzchak is the son of Avimelech. Furthermore, Rashi tells us that Yitzchak looked very much like Avraham, so people will say, אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק, without a doubt as to who his father is.

Avraham and Sarah were able to conceive Yitzchak once Hey was added to their name, representing the number 5. I conjecture, dovetailing off Rashi's explanation which points out that Yitzchak was born after their name change, to point out that once imbued with 5 ascending levels of communion with Hashem in the form of Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chaya and Yechida. These ascensions were imbued in Yitzchak; and although Avraham who represents the midda of "Chesed" traveled the world, Yitzchak represented the midda of "Gevura" (Pachad Yitzchak) and did not travel, rather, stayed in his place. The balance of Avraham and Yitzchak gave way to the birth of Ya'akov which represents the midda of "Tiferes".

On the theme of the prayers that the forefathers established it makes sense that Yitzchak established Mincha (as mentioned in last week's parsha). To repeat what has been said the Gemara in Berachos that Mincha is the most important prayer of the day as it requires the biggest sacrifice on the person

praying- Eliyahu was only answered at Mincha- which also means “gift” (in line with its associated sacrifice from the temple). The Tur explains that Mincha is difficult as its time shifts throughout the day, unlike the morning or evening where it is before or after we have begun our possibly turbulent days. Taking time out to daven and recognize Hashem and His power takes great sacrifice.

The Gemara in Berachos (29b) states that according to the opinion of Rabbi Yose be Rebbi Chanina and others, Yitzchak instituted the prayer of Mincha as it says in last week's parsha (Ber 24: 63) "that [He] Yitzchak went to converse (or meditate) in the field" וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׂוּמָה בְּשָׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עָרֵב וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵינָיו בִּנְהֹרָא and the Gemara proves that "converse" (or meditate) means prayer, quoting a posuk in Tehillim (102:1) תַּפִּלָּה לַעֲנִי כִּי־יִצְטָר וְלִפְנֵי ה' הִזָּהוּ יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ: "A prayer of the lowly man when he is faint and pours forth his plea before the LORD." The gemara elsewhere in Avoda Zara 7b states that one should pour out their affliction first before "sicha" praying.

According to Chassidus though, through the breaking of one's character can they channel true intent to pray, and through the prayer they would achieve the highest levels, much like the 5 ascensions imbued to Avraham, who bore Yitzchak through him who established the loftiest prayer of the day.

The Rebbe in a letter from Adar 19, 1951 to Rabbi Dovid Hecht develops an exegesis on Mincha and its importance- as well as an answer to Moshe's passing on Mincha of Shabbos (specifically that the medrish tells us that Moshe "wrote" multiple sifrei torah on the day of his passing, which would imply chillul Shabbos- which is obviously not the case). Mincha also is at a time of the day that Hashem stands and judges, and there is Gevura in the atmosphere (again according to Chassidus, Yitzchak emanated from the Midda of Gevurah). Furthermore, elsewhere, the Rebbe explains that at Mincha on Shabbos, specifically at the time of 3 seuda, the holiness of the day culminates. Although I have not seen a source directly for the same kind of culmination of spirituality on a weekday, the Rebbe in that letter seems to imply that after Mincha, specifically after davening, the spiritual and material worlds are aligned, and we merit victory over our day, specifically through taking the

Yitzchak versus Avraham represents opposite methods through which to connect to Hashem. Avraham from the Midda of Chesed is said to connect to Hashem through Ahava, love, whereas Yitzchak from the Midda of Gevura connects to Hashem through Yirah, fear. Both are necessary and result in connection to Hashem, and both work in tandem as Ya'akov who emanated the midda of Tiferes- which is a balance, of chesed and gevura.

Rashi points out many profound explanations on the early pesukim of the parsha, including the topic describing Esav's character ("a man of the field and trapping in his mouth"), he and Ya'akov prior to their thirteenth birthday were very similar in complexion and behaviour. Then at 13 Esav began to go astray, and he was "tzayid B'piv" in that he'd entrap his father with his words by asking halachik questions to trick his father into thinking he was noble.

Ya'akov is described as an “וְיַעֲקֹב אִישׁ יָשֵׁב אוֹהֳלִים”, “a simple man who sat in tents” as Rashi explains, simple also means whole, complete, which makes sense according to the idea that Ya'akov emanated the midda of tiferes, i.e. the combination/balance of Chesed and Gevura.

was uncommunicative unlike, Avraham and Sarah's or Rachel and Ya'akov (if this is the case, according to the Gemara in Eruvin 100b, a husband who "forces" marital relations will result in children who don't have good character (Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi), perhaps, this is why Esav was born first to Yitzchak and Rivka. They didn't even agree on who was the "better child" as the posuk tells us Yitzchak loved Esav and Rivka loved Ya'akov. Forces on the outside may sound like rape, but it is possible to interpret this as having not communicated with his wife... Maybe Yitzchak and Rivka's lack of communication is a problem. (later the gemara talks about consent i.e. rape, but in the first rendition of this adage, the word "force" is translated- "kofeh" vs. "shelo l'daas".)

וַיַּעֲמֵר יִצְחָק לִיהִיָּהּ לְנִכַּח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עָקְרָהּ הָיָא וַיַּעֲמֵר לֹא יְהִיָּהּ  
וַתֵּמֶר רַבִּקָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

וַיִּתְרָצֶצוּ הַבְּנִיִּים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם-כֹּף לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ  
 לְדֶרֶשׁ אֶת-יְהוָה: The fetus was kicking (when she  
 passed the Yeshiva or house of idol worship) and  
 she wasn't sure what was going on, and required  
 clarity. In her own doing, Rivka sought the  
 guidance of Shem, not her husband, who  
 theoretically could have clarified what the goings  
 on of her fetus was.



וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק הַשְׁכֵּבָה לִי כִּי־וַיִּשָּׁבַע לוֹ וַיִּמָּכֶר אֶת־בְּכֹרְתוֹ לְיִצְחָק:

וַיִּצְחָק בְּתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹ לָהֶם וַיִּגִּיד עַדְשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׁתַּי בִּגְמָם וַיִּלְךָ וַיָּבֹז עָשׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה: (ס)

The above verses show in great detail that another “transaction” took place and a trade that took place, much like the previous transactions of the past parshas (Rashi 25:31 tells us it is a clear indisputable transaction). Esav passes off future value for short term gains, and over a bowl of lentils, Ya’akov bargained for the elder’s birthright. The purpose of the birthright wasn’t to take more inheritance. Rather, Rashi points out that Esav asked Ya’akov why (aside from inheritance) would Esav bother with being firstborn. Ya’akov explained that until the Tribe of Levi comes (later) and is tasked with the service of sacrifices, it falls on the first borns, who are restricted from drinking wine and having long hair, two things Esav was recalcitrant on. Therefore, Esav saying אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לְמָוֶת וְלִמְדָה־יָגָה לִי בְכֹרָה, is him stating (according to Rashi) that he would be as if he was dead for violating the rules. So Esav gives up his birthright, and the story concludes וַיָּבֹז עָשׂו אֶת־הַבְּכֹרָה, which means he embarrassed, and mocked the birthright. The posuk tells us of Esav’s wickedness, that he scoffed at and belittled the service of Hashem. Which given his character could not be a worse representation of his father, Yitzchak, who’s prayer service Mincha specifically is about aggrandizing Hashem and Hashem’s dominion and power on earth.

A few pesukim later, Ber. 26:5 after Hashem tells Yitzchak to stay in Canan and not go down to Egypt (as he was pure sacrifice, which is also the reason why he didn’t have multiple wives – unlike his father, who had children before Sarah.) Hashem tells Yitzchak it is in the merit of Avraham who served Hashem that Yitzchak will be blessed with offspring and wealth. The words אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַעְתָּ מִצְוֹתַי הַקּוֹתִי וְתוֹרָתִי -אֶבְרָהָם בְּקִלְיִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי הַקּוֹתִי וְתוֹרָתִי the first word, which means “because” can also be an allusion to the fact that Ya’akov also listened to the voice of Avraham and followed the laws.

The prophecy of Shem has more representation later in the Parsha, after Yitzchak grew old and his eyes were blinded, this begins the setup of the young shall rule the old. Rashi explains that Yitzchak needed to go blind so that Ya’akov could take the

first blessing, (that he theoretically was rightly due because of his purchase of the birthright, or because he was formed first in the womb of Rivka), but also that the mighty shall rule and that the older will serve the younger. Yitzchak requested tasty food which also echoes the nature of Esav’s relationship and closeness to his father was through serving him (hence why Yitzchak could still love his ‘wicked’ son).

Rivka forces her son Ya’akov to break the rules and deceive her husband his father Yitzchak. She bears the responsibility for this, and as Rabbi Sacks points out, she didn’t seem to communicate the prophecy of Shem, so as to correct Yitzchak to bless the children appropriately. When Yitzchak asked who approaches, Ya’akov says in simple translation, it is I Esav your firstborn, but since Ya’akov wouldn’t lie, it could be read as “it is I, Esav is your firstborn.”

Yitzchak knew his son Esav, and therefore grew suspicious when Ya’akov attributed his haste to prepare the meal to Hashem (Verse 20). Yitzchak famously stated, וַיֹּאמֶר הַקֵּל קוֹל יִצְחָק וְהִידָּגִים יָדַי עָשׂו (not that Ya’akov and Esav’s voices were necessarily different, rather, the words being said were Ya’akov like and not Esav like). This famous expression was stated about Moshe Rabbeinu later when the Jews were fighting Amalek, and Chur and Yehoshua propped Moshe’s hands up, when they were up the Jews were victorious, when Moshe’s hands settled the Jews got overpowered- again an allusion to the power of the mighty, and that the older will serve the younger.

And then the appropriate blessing is given to Ya’akov that relates to the prophecy of Shem. וַיְתֹרֶלֶה הָאֱלֹהִים מִטַּל הַשָּׁמַיִם וּמִשְׁמֵן הָאָרֶץ וְרֵב דָּגָו וְתִירָשׁ: וְעִבְדוּךָ עַמִּים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ [וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ] לְךָ לְאֻמִּים גְּבוּרָה גְבִיר לְאֻמִּיךָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְךָ בְּגֵי אֶמְנָה אֶרְבִּידָה אֶרֶוּר וּמִבְרָכָיִךָ בְּרוּד:

The Bracha Yitzchak gives “Esav” is that God should give dew of the heavens, and the fatness of the earth and an abundance of wine and grain (i.e. great wealth), People will serve you, and nations will bow before you; be a lord to your brothers, and your mother’s sons will bow before you, and those who curse you shall be cursed, and those who bless you shall be blessed.” Through this bracha the prophecy of Shem is concretized, and the younger shall rule the older.

As well, the use of the word הַאֲלֵהִים which is the name of Hashem for Din, and gevurah, rashi explains means that there should be laws, again an allusion to the vision that Mashiach is a world where the Jews rule their domain, i.e. have their laws.

Rashi points out that on the verse where Esav asked why Ya'akov was called such, which is that he was to deceive him, Esav, also a reference to the earlier stated root Eikev.

Yitzchak it seems was fine in the end keeping the Bracha with Ya'akov after he was explained by Esav that Ya'akov had previously deceived him of his birthright, which as binding transaction that Esav wanted to redact, and throw out, but Yitzchak recognized as established. It is almost as if at this point Yitzchak realizes the true nature of Esav, as a person with a gift of gab. וַיֹּאמֶר הָבִי קְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב. וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי זֶה פְעָמִים אֶת-בְּכֹרְתִי לָקַח וְהִגֵּה עִתָּהּ לָקַח בְּרִכְתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא-אֶצְלָתָ לִי בְרִכָּה:

So much so, that in verse 37 chapter 27, וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב, וַיֹּאמֶר לַעֲשׂוֹ הֵן גִּבֹּר שְׁמִתִּיו לָךְ וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲחָיו נָתַתִּי לָךְ. לַעֲבָדִים וְדָגְו וְתִירָשׁ סִמְכִתִּיו וְלָקַח אֲפֹא מֶה אֲעֲשֶׂה בְּנִי: Yitzchak tells Esav, he's out of luck, he set in motion the works that the "younger shall rule the older"

The Torah uses an interesting word וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוֹ אֵלַי אֲבִיו הַבְּרִכָּה אֶת־הָאֵלֹהִים אֲבִי בְּרִכְתִּי גַם-אֲנִי אֲבִי וַיִּשָּׂא עֲשׂוֹ אֵלַי הַבְּרִכָּה אֶת־הָאֵלֹהִים אֲבִי בְּרִכְתִּי לָקַח וְהִגֵּה עִתָּהּ לָקַח בְּרִכְתִּי: that the bracha rashi explains means that the letter Hay acts as astonishment. Perhaps bringing in the earlier introduction of a Hay to Avraham that it represents the 5 levels of the soul, perhaps Esav, is there one blessing that Yitzchak can find on the levels of ascension of the soul with which to bless Esav. And Yitzchak reifies the prophecy further, וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו הִנֵּה מִשְׁמַנִּי, הָאֶרֶץ יִהְיֶה מִוֶּשְׁבָּךְ וּמִטְּלֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם מֵעַל: which means And his father Isaac answered, saying to him, "See, your abode shall enjoy the fat of the earth And the dew of heaven above. וְעַל-סִרְבֶּךָ תִּחְיֶה וְאֶת-אֲחִיךָ תַעֲבֹד וְהָיָה: Yet by your sword you shall live, And you shall serve your brother; But when you grow restive, You shall break his yoke from your neck."

Rivka was empowered with prophetic vision when she said: וְגַם-שְׁנֵיכֶם יוֹם אֶחָד: that in order to ensure that Ya'akov will persist and the prophecy will

come true, both had to die on the same day in the future (Rashi) – even though they didn't actually die on the same day (Sotah 13a) she was bereaved of her loss for both of them on the same day- Esav was killed while trying to stop Ya'akov from being buried in Machpela.

Rashi states that on Chapter 28 verse 5 on the words וַיַּעֲקֹב וַיֵּעָלֶה אֶם that this is one of 77 places where Rashi says he doesn't know why the posuk is written as such. In my opinion it is because previous accounts of Rivka and her need to use an emissary to pray, and the fact that she didn't think of herself worthy of being married to Yitzchak, stands to establish Rivka's greatness, not by the fact of her marriage to Yitzchak, or that fact that she is the daughter and sister to wicked people, rather she was righteous, and the mother of Ya'akov and Esav. Furthermore, it delineates that Rivka orchestrated the rivalry that is Ya'akov and Esav as partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Shem, and that is why the order is written mother of Ya'akov first and Esav second, even though Esav was the elder... Rivka's orchestration, and rectitude maintained the lineage such that Ya'akov will persist and his future generations will merit the coming of Mashiach, and Rivka will forever be known as our foremother.

Good Shabbos

