



Parshas Toldos

פרשת תולדות

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Why Me?

Shneur Agronin ('21)

Anyone with some degree of familiarity with the Talmud study likely knows of the back-and-forth style (*shakla vitarya*) of the textual clarification process which it often employs. Within this framework, a section of *Gemara* is broken down into multiple steps, each possessing a unique identity (question, answer, proof, etc.) which ascertains the step's purposes. Ensuring that every step belongs and fulfills its assigned duty is crucial for even a basic understanding of *Gemara* - as well as in studying any holy text which contains some form of back-and-forth, however concise or drawn out.

In *Parshas Toldos*, upon Rivkah begging *Hashem* to reveal the ultimate purpose of her pain in childbearing, He answers her that "Two nations are in your womb, and two kingdoms from within you shall separate, one stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (*Bereishis* 25:23). We can rather easily identify that Rivkah has asked *Hashem* a question; why must she endure such pain? We can similarly label *Hashem's* response as an answer, as it directly follows *Rivkah's* plea for one. But, upon thinking about the two logical "steps" within this conversation, so to speak, a difficulty seemingly arises - how does this answer satisfy the question? How does *Hashem* merely informing Rivkah of the future relationship between her unborn children justify to any extent her intense plight?

In order to explain how *Hashem's* answer properly addresses Rivkah's question, it is necessary to identify clearly what exactly Rivkah asked for. Rivkah's question is translated often as following the opinion of Rashi: "and the children struggled in her womb, and she said, 'If so, why do I exist?'" And she went to inquire of *Hashem*" (*Ibid.* 25:22). In other words, Rivkah seems to ask why she longed for children and prayed fervently for them, only to suffer so horri-

bly at the outcome - she never asked for the pain! But, taking a look at Rivkah's words spoken in Hebrew, they read "*im kein, lamah zeh anochi?*" Noting this, perhaps a more accurate translation would be, "If so [that this pregnancy entails such pain], why does this [state of being belong specifically to] me?" This translation follows that of the Ramban. Now, we may understand the question as not why Rivkah was experiencing such horrible pains, but why specifically she, and not the average woman, was going through this.

With this reading of the *possuk*, how does *Hashem's* response then assign a purpose to Rivkah's pains unique to her, thus accurately reflecting her question? Indeed, it is evident that *Hashem* first explains the logical basis for the pains themselves - she was pregnant with twins both competing physically and spiritually within a space cramped for even a single fetus. Yet, how the nature of Rivkah's pregnancy relates to her unique purpose is found by a closer reading of the *possuk*: "Two nations are in your womb, two kingdoms from within you shall separate...and the older shall serve the younger." *Hashem* seems to answer Rivkah that her ultimate destiny is not just to give birth to differing children, but that the very foundation for the future of *Klal Yisroel* as *Hashem's* uniquely elevated nation whose status transcends the natural order rested within her body, as the "older" and thus physically greater (*rav*) nation of *Edom* descending from Eisav eventually coming to serve them.

Thus, we can understand Rivkah as having longed to know what her own pains signified about how *Hashem* singled her out from other women with more peaceful pregnancies. *Hashem* then satisfies her curiosity, an-

swering her that she is destined to be the second matriarch of *Klal Yisroel*. Despite her intense pain, the "younger" but spiritually superior nation from whom the Jewish people would descend would ultimately rise above the physical subjugation at the hands of its brother. Indeed, this great and truly unique destiny would be worth the temporary discomfort of pregnancy. As we incorporate messages from the *parsha* into our lives this week, it might pay to wonder why we might incur suffering of either physical or spiritual nature, but more specifically, why we are experiencing it, and what it means about who we are as people, as Jews, and as members of *Hashem's* holy nation.

The Good In Eisav

Gavi Benoff (22)

In this week's *parsha*, *Parshas Toldos*, we read about the early childhood of Yaakov and Eisav. The *pesukim* describe how Eisav grew to be a wild hunter, while Yaakov preferred to sit in his tents and study. The *pesukim* then say that Yitzchak preferred Eisav "*ki tzayid bipiv*" - since there was game in his mouth - while Rivkah preferred Yaakov.

When learning these *pesukim*, I often wondered, why did Yitzchak specifically love Eisav, but not Yaakov? If anything, Yitzchak should have loved Yaakov, who seemed more like him, learning *Torah* (according to the *Midrash*) and doing *mitzvos*?

Radak answers that of course Yitzchak loved Yaakov; this is obvious, so the **Torah** does not even need to men-

A SHORT VORT

Akiva Kra (21)

In this week's *parsha*, the *possuk* says:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִצְחָק מִדּוֹעַ בְּאֵתֶם אֵלַי וְאֵתֶם שְׂנֵאתֶם אֹתִי וְתִשְׁלַחְנִי מֵאֶתְכֶם: וַיֹּאמְרוּ רָאוּ רְאִינוּ כִּי־הִיא יְהוָה עִמָּךְ"

"Yitzchak said to them, "Why have you come to me? You hate me and drove me away from you!" And they said, "We have indeed seen that Hashem has been with you".

This conversation of Yitzchak asking Avimelech, a king who kicked Yitzchak out of his land for being too successful, is slightly odd. Why would Avimelech want to bring Yitzchak back? The *Targum Yonasan* explains why Avimelech came back to Yitzchak. He writes that "when Yitzchak left, the wells dried up and the trees bore no fruit".

Sometimes, when *Hashem* blesses us with many great things, we forget they are from Him, and we start thinking that the supernatural is something that happens regardless of God. This is the mistake that Avimelech made. When his land was blessed, he thought it was just good luck and therefore he didn't think twice about kicking out Yitzchak. When Yitzchak left, *Hashem* didn't need to bless the land anymore, and Avimelech realized he made a mistake.

May we all be blessed with tremendous *berachah* and *hatzlachah*, and the *emunah* to always remember that everything is from *Hashem*.

tion it. However, when it came to Eisav, the *Torah* needed to give a reason why Yitzchak loved him. Radak says that this reason is because Yitzchak was old, and that Eisav was willing to bring his father tasty, tender meat.

Chizkuni agrees with Rashi, saying that the *possuk* had to tell us that Yitzchak loved Eisav, because in reality, he did not always love him, but he did love him when he brought him meat. This is in contrast to the *possuk* telling us that Rivkah always loved Yaakov. Still, was bringing him meat enough to make him loved by Yitzchak?

Maybe we need to make sure we understand what the phrase "*ki tzayid bipiv*" means. Rashi gives two possible explanations: first, that Eisav literally gave meat to Yitzchak, so the phrase means that Yitzchak loved Eisav because there literally was meat in his (Yitzchak's) mouth. Rashi's other explanation is that the word "*tzayid*" refers not to meat, but to trickery, since "*latzud*" means to trap. Then, the phrase "*ki tzayid bipiv*" means that Yitzchak loved Eisav, because Eisav tricked Yitzchak into thinking he was different than he really was.

Chizkuni seems to agree with both of Rashi's interpretations, combining them into one, by saying that "*tzayid*," hunting, by nature involves some cunning and trickery. Rashi and *Chizkuni* in any case, Eisav was bad and not necessarily deserving of Yitzchak's love. Rashi gives the second explanation, that *tzayid* means Eisav tricked his father, possibly because he was not satisfied with his first, simpler explanation. *Chizkuni* seems to be saying that even if Eisav did bring his father meat, that there was a deceptive or tricky way about him.

Radak answers a little differently from both of these commentaries. He seems to say that even though Eisav chose many things unwisely, as opposed to his brother Yaakov - for instance choosing to make his living by hunting, putting himself in danger every day, and following a path that was by its nature cunning - he still brought tasty, tender food to his father, which is a *chessed*, and a form of *kibbud av vi'em*. Maybe Eisav really earned this love of his father, though his mother saw the more dangerous sides of his choices.

Rashi, commenting about the earlier *possuk* "*vayigdelu hane'arim*" (and the boys grew up), says that when Yaakov and Eisav were little, their choices of how to spend their time, were not considered as important and were not really inspected. However, when they grew, which Rashi defines as turning thirteen, their choices mattered, and they chose different paths - Yaakov choosing the *beis medrash*, and Eisav choosing idol worship.

5 Minute Lomdus

Shimi Kaufman (21)

ועתה שא-נא כליך תליך וקשתך וצא השדה וצודה לי צידה

"And now, please take your tools, your quiver and bow, and go out to the field and trap game for me".

Q. The *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 22a) cites a *machlokes* between Rabi Yochanan and Reish Lakish regarding the nature of responsibility for damage done by someone's fire. Reish Lakish holds that "*eisho mishum mimono*" - literally "his [responsibility for] fire is due to [it being] his property". In other words, one is responsible for damage caused by fire the same way he would be responsible for damage caused by anything which he owns, such as an ox or pit. Rabi Yochanan, however, maintains that responsibility for damage caused by a fire is due to the principle of "*eisho mishum chetzvo*" - his [responsibility for] fire is due to [it being] his arrow." In other words, when his fire burns something after he lit it, it is as if he shot an arrow at that which was damaged. Just as one is responsible to pay for damage caused by an arrow, even though he technically shot it before the damage was caused, so too, one is responsible to pay for damage caused by a fire. The *Gemara* discusses several *nafka minahs* (practical differences) which emerge from these differing opinions. However, there is a famous *kashya* which is asked on the opinion of Rabi Yochanan. According to the opinion of Rabi Yochanan, that *eisho mishum chetzvo*, how can anyone ever light candles for *Shabbos*? According to this *shitah*, when fire causes damage, it is considered as if you lit it at that moment, just as by an arrow. If so, then when *Shabbos* candles burn on *Shabbos*, every second which they burn should be as though you lit them at that moment, thereby violating the *issur* of lighting a fire on *Shabbos*! According to Rabi Yochanan, how is anyone allowed to light *Shabbos* candles?

A. The opinion of *eisho mishum chetzvo* does not mean that every second which the fire burns is like you lit it at that moment. Rather, whatever damage the fire does is considered to have **already been done** at the time when the fire was first lit. This is comparable to an arrow, since in both instances, damage done after an action is considered to have been done at the time of the action. Thus, one can still light *Shabbos* candles according to Rabi Yochanan, since we do not say that each moment the fire burns, it is as if he is lighting it in that moment; rather, we say that any effects of the fire are considered to have been done from when he lit the fire.

-Source: *Nimukei Yosef Al Maseches Bava Kamma* (10a *Bidapei HaRif*)
(Authors Note: Thank you to Rabbi Shimon Kerner, my 10th grade rebbi, who taught us this Nimukei Yosef when I was in his shiur!)

From these opinions, it is apparent that when looking at someone, one must look at that person from all angles, and both the good and bad that they do. And, we see that while our choices of how to spend our time may seem insignificant now, in the long run, they may matter more than we realize.

What's Old Is New

Aryeh Kolber (21)

After Yitzchok was forced out of the land of the Pelishtim, he went on to dig up all of Avraham's wells that the Pelishtim had covered up. He also renamed the wells after the original names which Avraham had given them. The *Chachamim* explain the roles that Avraham and Yitzchok played with these wells as reflective of their role within the world at large: Avraham's role was to "dig new wells", to discover new ideas by constantly asking questions and looking for a deeper meaning behind things. Yitzchok's role was seemingly less admirable: to continue doing what Avraham had done. Yitzchok had no innovations; he simply dug and named the wells exactly as they had been before.

Was this really such a great achievement then? What did he accomplish? Rav Adin Steinsaltz answers this question with a Rashi in *Devarim* (6:6) on the famous words of *krias Shema* which state "*asher Ani mitzvavcha hayom*" - that which I (*Hashem*) command you today. Rashi comments that the meaning of "*hayom*" (today) is that the *mitzvos* should not be like a "*diyutgima yishanah*" - an antiquated royal decree which nobody actually pays attention to. Rather, each day they should be viewed as if they were given that day, and one should approach them with the same excitement as he would if he had received the *mitzvah* that very day. One should feel that his *mitzvah* or accomplishment is new each time that he succeeds in that area. Rabbi Dovid Kaminetsky *zt"l*, the former principal of my elementary school, RYNJ, used to give a *berachah* to every kid at his *Hanachas Tefillin*: "May you be *zocheh* to put on your *tefillin* every day with the same excitement as you did today." Each day, the *mitzvos* are supposed to feel as though they are newly given.. But feeling as if something is new and it actually being new are two distinct things. Even if Yitzchok felt like he was accomplishing new things, he was still treading in the footsteps of his father. What did Yitzchok really accomplish?

Rav Steinsaltz answers that in reality, persistence is a much harder trait that it seems. Once the initial excitement of doing something wears off, then doing the action becomes much harder. Persistence is not a one-shot deal. It gets harder as time goes on. That ability to persist, despite it getting more difficult, is what separates a failed company from a successful one. A successful company persists with their idea no matter how hard it gets.

But what makes persistence so difficult? One might answer that it is the fact that the idea that one is trying to pursue loses its remarkability and becomes typical. Rav Steinsaltz explains that the *Pelishti Weltanschauung* was to make everything regular. They accomplished this vis a vis the wells when they "*sismum*" (stopped) them up. The *shoresh, sasam*, denotes that the Pelishtim turned the wells into regular, ordinary piles of dirt. They took something special, unique, beautiful, and made it mundane and ordinary. They did not do this maliciously; rather, it was a part of their sociology. If they had been evil in this endeavor, the *Torah* would have warned the Jews not to adopt their practices like it does about the Egyptians and Canaanim.

So how does this feeling of "*sasam*" occur? How do we take three steps back before *Shemoneh Esrei* and only realize that we had not been paying attention to what we were saying when we take three steps again after *Shemoneh Esrei*? Rav Steinsaltz suggests that a person must revitalize his desire and excitement to do *mitzvos* regularly. Otherwise, he will slowly and gradually lose his excitement. He compares this to a man walking through the snow. If the man stops and lays down for a minute, he will contract hypothermia and die. His only option is to keep on going. However, the man does not just suddenly die; the process is gradual. Similarly, if a person "lies down" for a minute and does not constantly revitalize his excitement to do the *mitzvos*, "he will die" and gradually lose the strength to fulfill the *mitzvos*.

Therefore, the task we are all faced with is redigging the wells that we had dug before; rediscovering the desire that we discovered before. While this may be as difficult as it was to originally dig those wells and find the excitement to do the *mitzvos*, we must push through the challenge and dig up the excitement that we already discovered. In a sense, we can be like both Avraham and Yitzchok, by revitalizing our excitement in *mitzvos* like Yitzchok, but also by looking for a deeper meaning behind the actions that we rediscover. And in this way, not only will we be able to continuously serve God in a joyous manner, but we will also be able to improve upon our service and achieve new, unattained heights.

Planting And Finding

Akiva Kra (21)

While there are many levels and paths through which one can understand the *Torah*, the "plain" text usually makes sense when read with no background knowledge. For this reason, we sometimes miss questions that are "jumping out" of the page. One of the greatest examples of a *possuk* that appears to make no sense when thought through thoroughly is in this week's *parsha*, when the *Torah* says, "*And Yitzchak planted in that land, and he found in that year one hundred times [the usual crop]*." At first glance, this *possuk* appears to be rather innocuous, but a closer look reveals that this *possuk* is actually a par-

adox! For Yitzchak to both “plant” and “find” is an inherent contradiction; finding is when you happen to come across something you didn’t know about or work for, whereas planting is something that one spends hours each day doing for many months each year. Why does the *possuk* say that Yitzchak “found” that which he planted?

Rav Chananya Yom Tov Lipa Teitelbaum, in his most famous work, the *Kedushas Yom Tov*, suggests an answer to this question. He writes that Yitzchak realized that whatever work he would do would have no relation with what would come out. What results from one’s work- what one finds- is a gift from *Hashem*. The work we have to do is not the cause of our success. One can work hard in one area, and be successful in a different way.

Perhaps a story that can further explain this. The *Chofetz Chaim* once saw a Jew crying hysterically. The *Chofetz Chaim*, a *gadol biTorah* who also cared for each Jew, went over and asked what happened. The Jew replied that he was a wagon driver, and his horse had just died. “How can I make a living with my horse being dead?” the Jew asked the *Chofetz Chaim*. He replied to the man by saying, “If you are convinced that your horse gave you your living, then you should be crying, because your means of making a wage just went away. However, if you think for a moment and realize that it wasn’t the horse supporting you all these years, rather, *Hashem* supports you and the horse is only the messenger, then you’ll understand that *Hashem* can very easily send another messenger! So

why are you crying?” This applies to non-wagon drivers as well. If one is fired or feels they have lost an opportunity, can’t *Hashem* send you another messenger? “Planting” and the eventual outcome are two different things.

Perhaps this explanation can be even more powerful when contemplating the explanation of Rabbeinu Bachya on this *possuk* as well. Rabbeinu Bachya asks why the *possuk* says “in that land”. Why can’t we just know that Yitzchak planted? He explains that the reason the *Torah* emphasized “in that land,” is that it was hard ground which did not usually produce much. (Rashbam, Rashi quoting *Bereishis Rabbah* and others also write that the land was difficult.) This fits in very well with the above idea. Yitzchak found what *Hashem* gave him- he just happened to do his work there, in a place where it was difficult and unlikely to have successful planting.

Lastly, the *Sforno* writes that the one hundred-fold of growth was in accordance with Hashem’s promise to Avraham in *Bereishis* (12:2), “I will be with you and bless you,” meaning with material blessings.

It is true that most times when we succeed at something, there was a long prepared application that preceded the success, and most times when we “hit the jackpot”, we had put in much prior effort. Yet, it is vitally important we remember that there is no correlation between effort and reward, and everything is from *Hashem*.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: ANIMALS IN THE PARSHA

Yisroel David Rosenberg (23)

Some Clothes

Hashem made special clothing for Adam and Chavah before he sent them out of *Gan Eden*. *Pirkei DiRabbi Eliezer* tells of the interesting path that these clothes, called *katnos or*, take over a few generations.

In *Pirkei DiRabbi Eliezer*, Rabbi Chanina mentions how the *possuk* describes Nimrod as a “*gibur tzayid*”, a mighty hunter (*Bereishis* 10:9). Rabbi Yehudah then explains why Nimrod was such a noteworthy hunter in the first place. The *katnos or* were brought onto the *teivah* with Noach, and Cham later gifted them to his grandson, Nimrod. When he was wearing these special clothes, animals would come forward and bow to Nimrod. This is what made Nimrod so ‘mighty in hunting’.

Rabbi Meir (referred to in the text as “Rebbi”) mentions that these clothes make another appearance in this week’s *parsha*, *Parshas Toldos*. He explains that Eisav became jealous of these miraculous clothes, and killed Nimrod in order to take them for himself. Rabbi Meir says that these were the clothes of Eisav that Rivkah took to dress Yaakov when he needed to impersonate his brother. The *possuk* describes them as “*bigdei Eisav hachamudos*” (*Bereishis* 27:15), meaning “Eisav’s coveted clothes”. In other words, these were the clothes which his jealousy had led him to steal. This is also why Eisav is referred to as a “*ish yodea tzayid*”, a man knowledgeable in hunting (*Bereishis* 25:27). Like Nimrod, when wearing these garments, Eisav had power over animals and was able to hunt them easily.

These clothes are quite the source of power over nature and of deceit. Some clothes! The only question left is: was Yaakov’s use of the clothes able to redeem them for the actions of their previous owners?

CHASIDUS ON THE PARSHA

Peshurin Sorscher (21)

In this week's *parsha*, we are introduced to the genealogy of our forefather Yitzchok. He was granted two sons whom we all know: Yaakov and Eisav. The Chasidic masters all deal with the question of why only Yaakov followed in Yitzchok's path of righteousness, while Eisav descended into materialism. They answer with a powerful lesson for us all. When a person is born, there is an opportunity for them to continue in their parents footsteps, using all that their parents have given them as a springboard to forge their own journey. They are presented with a choice how they want to live their lives, and they can reach unprecedented heights or all time lows - the choice is up to them. Yaakov and Eisav came from parents who were so close to *Hashem*, and whose entire lives we're dedicated to His service. Yet, they both had a choice about who they wanted to be. So when Yaakov and Eisav lived their lives, they made different choices which shaped their lives in different ways. Their decisions were the cause of their respective growth and downfall. How many times in our lives are we presented with a choice and we say that it's too hard? We have to realize that we have the choice in our hands to do what's right. When we realize that we always have the ability to do better, nothing can stand in our way.

WISDOM FROM THE HAFTORAH

כִּי־שָׁפְטִי לִהְיוֹן יִשְׁמְרוּ־דַעַת וְתוֹרָה יִבְקֶשׁוּ מִפִּיהוּ כִּי מֵלֶאֱלֹהִים יְהוֹרֶה־צְבָאוֹת הוּא:

"For the lips of the priest guard knowledge, and they shall seek Torah from his mouth, since he is an angel of the Lord Of Legions" (Malachi 2:7)

The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 15b) derives from this *possuk* that only if one's *rebbe* is like "an angel of the Lord Of Legions" should one "seek *Torah* from his mouth." The Rambam (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 4:1) understands this to mean that one may not learn from a *rebbe* who does not himself demonstrate appropriate behavior. However, the Rambam does not say that the *rebbe* must be completely free of sin; instead, the Rambam only forbids learning from a *rebbe* who consistently walks on a *derech lo tovah* (bad path). This would appear to preclude the comparison to an angel, as angels have no *yetzer hara* (Evil Inclination) and cannot sin. If a *rebbe* is not required to be completely free of any sin, then why does the *Gemara* say that a *rebbe* must resemble an angel?

Rav Nisson Alpert *ztz"l* gave a unique interpretation of this *Gemara* based on the *Medrash* quoted by Rashi in *Parshas Vayera*. Rashi, commenting on the story of the three angels who came to visit Avraham after his *bris milah*, explains that three angels were needed because there were three unique tasks which needed to be accomplished on Earth, and each angel can have only one mission. The same is true, explained Rav Nisson, for a *rebbe*. A *rebbe* must have only one mission, to educate his *talmidim* and to help them grow. If the *rebbe* has other interests or motives, then he will not be able to educate to his fullest potential. This may be why a *rebbe* is not allowed to be paid for teaching *Torah*, since this would reveal an ulterior motive for his job. A *rebbe* must be like an angel, fully focused on his mission, without any distractions.

While most of us are not yet at a point where we are teaching *Torah*, there is still a lesson to be learned here. Teaching *Torah* and educating others is an intensive task, and one that requires full concentration and commitment. It should not be attempted by one who cannot commit fully to it, especially if they are still in the midst of their own development. It can often be tempting to take a leading or teaching role among friends or peers, but we must remember that there must be a *lilmod* (learning) before the *lilamed* (teaching). While it is certainly beneficial to have a positive influence on others, we must remember that unless we are ready to be "like an angel", we are not yet ready to take a full teaching role.

FROM THE EDITORS' DESK

Torah Of The Womb

The tale of Yaakov and Eisav is fundamental to the history of the Jewish nation. In a sense, the entire history of our people from Yaakov and on can be viewed as reflecting the struggle between these two brothers, locked in a never-ending duel of spirituality versus materialism, peace versus war, and kindness versus depravity. Indeed, Chazal describe how this feud had already begun when the twins were in utero. Commenting on the *possuk* (*Bereishis* 25:22) which states "*vayisrotzitzu habonim bikirbah*" - and the sons kicked inside of her [Rivkah] - Rashi explains that whenever Rivkah would pass a *beis avodah zarah*, a house of idol worship, Eisav would kick to try and leave to there, whereas when she would pass a *beis medrash*, Yaakov would start struggling to leave. Eisav's desire to leave his mother's womb to go worship *avodah zarah* is somewhat understandable, but Yaakov's reaction would appear completely bizarre - the *Gemara* (*Niddah* 30b) famously states that before a child is born, a *maalach* descends from Heaven and teaches the fetus the entire *Torah*. Why was Yaakov so eager to be born and learn in a *beis medrash*, when he had a personal tutor to teach him *kol haTorah kulah* already?

Two answers are suggested to this question, both of which can give us vital insight into how we can best grow in our *Torah* learning. The *Beis Halevi*, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the great-grandfather of 'The Rav'), answers that although Yaakov was learning, it was incredibly difficult for him to share the space with the wicked Eisav. Yaakov wanted to leave to a place where everyone was involved with *Torah* and *avodas Hashem*, even if it meant decreasing his level of learning. The reason for this is based on the Rambam at the beginning of the sixth *perek* of *Hilchos Deiyos* (known to *talmidim* of Rabbi Mendelson as "*rebbe's* favorite Rambam"). The Rambam writes that it is the nature of a person to be pulled, in both his thoughts and actions, after the people with whom he surrounds himself. For this reason, the Rambam continues, a person is obligated to surround himself with *talmidei chachomim* and *tzaddikim*, and to do whatever it takes to spend time with them and be influenced by them. And, conversely, the Rambam writes that one must stop at nothing to avoid negative influences, even going as far as to say that if necessary, one must flee into the depths of the forest to avoid being enticed by groups of people with values antithetical to *Torah*. Yaakov was desperate to leave Rivkah's body because he knew that despite the fact that he had someone to teach him *Torah*, as long as he was constantly with Eisav, he was at risk of being pulled away by his brother.

The second answer suggested comes from Rav Berel Soloveitchik *zt"l*, son of the Brisker Rov and great-grandson of the *Beis Halevi*. He explains based on a famous report of the students of the Vilna Gaon, the Gra, about their *rebbe's* method of learning. The Gra's *talmidim* reported that although their *rebbe* often merited Divine revelation in the course of his *Torah* study, he was not as proud of these ideas as he was of those which he developed through intense effort. The Vilna Gaon cared more for those *chiddushim* which came from his own *yegiah* (toil) than he was of those which were simply granted to him from Heaven. The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 6b) states: *yagata vilo matzasa, al ta'amin; lo yagata umatzasa, al ta'amin; yagata umatzasa, ta'amin* - if someone says they worked at learning and did not succeed (lit. find), do not believe him; if someone says he did not work hard at learning and succeeded; if someone says they worked hard at learning and succeeded, you should believe him. The second clause of this *Gemara* seems strange, as it seems perfectly reasonable that a particularly brilliant individual could see just as much success in his learning as an average person who puts in more effort. Why must we not believe someone if he says that he did not put in that much effort and succeeded in learning? Rather, the intention of the *Gemara* is that if someone does not toil sufficiently in learning, even if he sees success, this is still not called "finding", since whatever he gets will only be because of his natural intelligence, not any work on his part. If the *Torah* is handed to us on a silver platter, then while we may acquire the knowledge, we will not be experiencing the *Torah* to the fullest extent. While Yaakov was learning the whole *Torah* before he was born, it was all being given to him directly from *Shamayim*, without him having to put in any effort. This kind of learning, while enjoyable, is not the pinnacle of what a person can achieve. Yaakov longed to be out in the world, struggling with *sugyos* and acquiring *Torah* in the manner which *Hashem* intended. For this reason, he struggled to leave to the *beis medrash* whenever Rivkah would pass by it.

Two lessons emerge for us. First, we must never underestimate the influence which our environment can have on our learning. If we want to succeed in *Torah*, we must make sure to surround ourselves with people with similar goals and values. And second, we must be willing to put in effort to truly see *hatzlochah* in our learning. Even if we carve out time to learn in our day, if we are not putting our whole strength into the learning, we cannot expect to truly see the full beauty of the *Torah*. As we continue with this *zman* in *yeshiva*, let's all try to work on creating an environment which is conducive to *Torah*, and where everyone exerts their full energy towards their learning.

Wishing everyone an amazing *Shabbos*,
-Shimi Kaufman

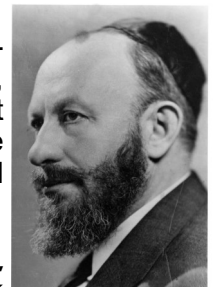
GEDOLIM GLIMPSE: THE PATH OF TWO PAVERS: RAV AHARON KOTLER AND RABBI DR. DOV REVEL

Meir Morell (22)



Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891–1962) was born in Svislac, Russian Empire, to Rav Shneur Zalman Kotler. From a young age, he was known as a tremendous illuy (genius) and an intense lamdan (learner). He was orphaned at the age of 10 and adopted by his uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak Pinnes, a dayan (judge) in Minsk. He studied in the Slabodka yeshiva in Lithuania under the "Alter (elder) of Slabodka", Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, and Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein. Rav Aharon married Chana Perel, a daughter of Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, and joined his father-in-law in running the yeshiva of Slutsk.

Rav Dov (Bernard) Revel (1885-1940) was born in Prienai, a neighboring town of Kovno (Kaunas), then part of the Russian Empire, now in Lithuania. He was a son of Rabbi Nachum Shraga Revel. His father was his first teacher, and when Rabbi Nachum Revel died in 1896 he was buried next to his close friend, the great Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor - indicative of his knowledge and stature.



He briefly studied in the Telshe Yeshiva, attending the lectures of its Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch. He was also taught by the renowned Rabbi Yitzchok "Itzele" Blazer, a main talmid of Rav Yisrael Salanter, and learned in the Kovno kollel. Rav Revel received semicha at the age of 16, but it is not known from whom. Thereafter, the young scholar earned a Russian high school diploma, apparently through independent study. He also became involved in the Russian revolutionary movement, and following the unsuccessful revolution of 1905, was arrested and imprisoned. Upon his release the following year, he emigrated to the United States.

In November 1908, Revel was introduced to his future wife, Sarah Travis of Marietta, Ohio, whom he married in 1909. The members of the Travis family were wealthy Oklahoma oil-men, and Rabbi Revel

moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma to join the family business after finishing his doctorate. However, even while serving as an assistant to his brother-in-law Solomon in the petroleum business, and amassing his own fortune, Rav Revel's primary occupation continued to be his *Torah* study.

After World War I, Rav Kotler moved with the yeshiva from Slutsk to Kletsk in Belarus. With the outbreak of World War II, Rav Kotler and the yeshiva relocated to Vilna, then the major refuge of most yeshivos from the occupied areas. Reportedly, Rav Kotler encouraged the yeshiva to stay in Vilna despite the approaching Nazis. Most of his students were murdered by the Nazis. Some did not listen to him and escaped to China. He was brought to America on April 10th, 1941 by the Vaad Hatzalah rescue organization, and he guided the organization during the Holocaust. At first, he settled in New York City's Upper West Side, and in 1949, he moved to the Borough Park neighborhood of Brooklyn.

Immediately after his arrival in the United States, Rav Revel enrolled in New York's RIETS yeshiva. He received a master of arts degree from New York University in 1909. Around this time, one of America's senior rabbis and president of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, Rabbi Bernard Levinthal of Philadelphia, visited the *yeshiva* and, after discussing learning with Rav Revel, invited him to come to Philadelphia as the rabbi's secretary and assistant. Rav Revel accepted the post and began to familiarise himself with the alien milieu of American Jewry. At the same time, he began attending law school in Philadelphia, but eventually decided that the law was not his calling. In 1911, he earned a doctorate of philosophy from Dropsie College, the first graduate of that school; his thesis was entitled "The Karaite Halakhah and Its Relation to Sadducean, Samaritan, and Philonian Halakhah".

In 1943, Rav Kotler founded Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, with 15 students. By the time of his death in 1962, the yeshiva had grown to 250 students. He was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Shneur Kotler, as Rosh Yeshiva. As of 2020, Beth Medrash Govoha is run by his grandson, Rabbi Malkiel Kotler, and three of his grandsons-in-law, Rabbis Yerucham Olshin, Yisroel Neuman, and David Schustal. By 2019, the yeshiva had grown into the largest institution of its kind in America, with 6,715 students, 2,748 regular and 3,967 in Kollel status. At the same time, the surrounding Lakewood community supports a network of more than 100 other yeshivas, and approximately 200 synagogues for an Orthodox population estimated at more than 66,000.

In 1915, Harry Fischel, on the Board of Directors of the newly merged RIETS, asked Rav Revel to come back East and head the institution. In him, Mr. Fischel saw a learned and forward thinking educator to lead the *yeshiva* on the path of becoming a college. Rav Revel took up the position and was appointed as RIETS's first president and *Rosh Yeshiva*.

Besides for his research, Rav Revel channeled his intellect towards strengthening the foundation of Jewish Orthodoxy in America. He was most concerned with problems of maintaining traditional observance in the modern setting. He sought to build up an educational system for American Jewry where they would not feel alienated. In his speeches, Rav Revel rarely, if ever, used difficult Torah language. Instead, he used very simple terms that were readily understandable. At a speech for the Rabbinic Council of America (RCA) Rav Revel praised "the light of human reason", and declared "the ascending spirit of mankind will triumph."

Rav Revel consistently maintained that secular knowledge in Judaism was never separate from the study of *Torah*. He emphasized the importance of unifying Judaism and secular studies. Often speaking of the "harmonious union of culture and spirituality," he believed that knowledge of the liberal arts would broaden one's understanding of *Torah*. However, Rav Revel's dedication to Orthodox Jewry was undisputed. For instance, he forbade the use of a female vocalist in the 1926 Music Festival, as men listening to women singing is a violation of Orthodox Jewish law. In a similar vein, he did not allow Reform Jews to serve on Yeshiva College's national board of directors, as well as many other efforts. One of the reasons Rav Revel gave for the merging of Yeshiva College and RIETS was "so that these men may not be lost to us [through assimilation]".

A committed anti-Zionist, Rav Kotler also helped establish Chinuch Atzmai, the independent religious school system in Israel, and was the chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Assembly of Torah Greats) of Agudath Israel. He chaired the Rabbinical administration board of Torah Umesorah, and was on the presidium of the Agudas HaRabbonim of the U.S. and Canada.

Upon the death of his father-in-law, Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, he inherited his father-in-law's po-

sition of Rosh Yeshiva of Etz Chaim Yeshiva of Yerushalayim. In an unusual arrangement, he held this position while continuing to live in America, while visiting Yerushalayim occasionally.

Rav Revel was a presidium member of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis from 1924, later being appointed its honorary president, and authored many articles on Jewish subjects in various Hebrew periodicals such as the Jewish Quarterly Review, Yagdil Torah, Ha-Pardes, and various Yeshiva student publications. He started writing a commentary to the Talmud Yerushalmi in Philadelphia, but this was never published. He was an associate editor of Otzar Yisrael, the Hebrew Encyclopedia. In 1935, he became the first vice president of the Jewish Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In 1986, he appeared on a \$1 U.S. Postage stamp, as part of the Great Americans Series. U.S. engraver Kenneth Kipperman, who designed the stamp, was suspended for including a tiny Star of David, invisible to the naked eye, in Rav Revel's beard.

Rav Kotler died at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City on November 29/Kislev 2, 1962. In an atmosphere described as being "reminiscent of Yom Kippur", eulogies were delivered by such greats as Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, among others. Following the funeral, Rav Kotler's body was transported to Idlewild Airport, to be flown to Israel accompanied by two dozen of his students. After arriving in Israel, the plane carrying Rav Kotler's coffin was greeted by a crowd of 5,000 at the airport. Jerusalem traffic was brought to a standstill by crowds of 30,000 people who lined the path of the procession transporting his body from the airport to Etz Chaim Yeshiva, where thousands of mourners from throughout Israel came to offer their final respects before his burial on Har Hamenuchos.

Rav Revel experienced a stroke during one of his classes, from which he never recovered. He died on December 2/Kislev 2, 1940.

Although these two men and the communities they built were extremely different, it is difficult not to see a connection between the two. Both of these *rabbonim* came from a land that was on the brink of decimation, and built up communities in what at the time was viewed as a religious wasteland. It is fitting that they share a *yahrzeit* on the 2nd of *Kislev*. Each used all their strength to make their mark, and each of their flames still continue until today.

PARSHA PUZZLERS

Submit your answers to shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org along with your name and cell phone number to be entered into a raffle at the end of the sefer! 1 answer = 1 entry!

(Hint: Use the commentaries in the Mekraos Gedolos Chumashim, along with the Toldos Aharon on the side to find relevant Gemaras and Midrashim)

1. What *posuk* in this week's *parsha* has five verbs in a row?
2. Who else in Tanach besides for Eisav is called an *Admoni* - a red person?
3. In what two contexts does the number 40 appear in our *parsha*? Name five other times that the number 40 appears in *Sefer Bereishis*.

HALACHA HASHAVUAH

Posef Weiner (23)

The Gemara (*Berachos* 30a) states that one who is outside of *Eretz Yisroel* should daven facing *Eretz Yisroel*. The *Shulchan Aruch* codifies this as *halachah* (*Orach Chayim* 94). The *Aron Kodesh* is typically placed on the wall facing *Eretz Yisroel* so that when one prays facing the *Aron Kodesh*, they will be facing *Eretz Yisroel* (*Mishnah Berurah* 94:9).

In some places, such as the MTA *beis medrash*, the *Aron* is facing a different direction than *Eretz Yisroel*, so the question arises as to which way to face while davening. The *Chofetz Chaim* discusses this topic in his *Biyur Halachah*, and does not come to a conclusion (150). However, in the *Mishnah Berurah*, the *Chofetz Chaim* writes that one should face Yerushalayim and not the *Aron* (94: 9 and 10). Rav Shmuel Wosner maintains that we should follow the ruling of the *Mishnah Berurah*. Rav Wosner writes that the reason behind the *Mishnah Berurah's* ruling is that facing *Eretz Yisroel* has sources in the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*, while placing the *Aron* on the wall facing *Eretz Yisroel*, so we could face it as well when davening, is only customary (*Shevet Halevi* Vol. 10 20). Furthermore, if it is impossible to put the *Aron* on the wall facing Yerushalayim, it should at the very least not be placed on the wall opposite Yerushalayim, since the prohibition to turning one's back to the *Aron* supersedes facing *Eretz Yisroel* during *tefillah* (*Mishnah Berurah* 94:9, *Aruch Hashulchan* 94:5).

If one is davening with a congregation that is facing the *Aron*, not *Eretz Yisroel*, he should face the *Aron* along with them while turning his face towards *Eretz Yisroel*. This is because if he faces the proper direction, it will look as if he is davening towards a different God than the congregation, *chas vishalom*. (*Mishna Berurah* 94:10)

In a case where the *Aron* was originally placed in the wrong direction, it may be moved to the proper place. There is no concern of lowering the *kedushah* of the spot where the *Aron* was originally placed, since the *Aron* was placed there mistakenly. Thus, the area never gained the *Aron's kedushah*. Also, since the *Aron* remains in the *shul*, the entire *shul* retains the same level of *kedushah* (*Dirshu Mishnah Berurah* footnote 94:5).

Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach ruled that if placing the *Aron* on the wall facing *Eretz Yisroel* would reduce the capacity of a *shul*, the *shul* may place the *Aron* on a different wall. He supports this based on the fact that in previous generations, they did not have the practice to be exact in placing the *Aron* on the wall facing *Eretz Yisroel* (*Dirshu Mishnah Berurah* footnote 94:4).

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Parsha Summary

Parshas Toldos begins with an accounting of the childhood of Yitzchak's two sons, Yaakov and Eisav. After *davening* for many years to have children, Yitzchak and Rivkah were blessed with twins, with Yaakov emerging grabbing onto the heel of Eisav. Yitzchak preferred Eisav, since Eisav deceived him into believing he was righteous, while Rivkah preferred Yaakov. Eisav grew to be a wild man of the field, while Yaakov sat and learned. At the age of 13, right after the death of Avraham, Eisav returned from a day of hunting and killing to find that Yaakov was making stew. In his ravenous state, Eisav agreed to trade the right of the firstborn to Yaakov in exchange for some of the soup. The *parsha* diverges for a bit to talk about Yitzchak's sojourn into the land of the Pelishtim, and the wells and money which he built up there. Near the end of Yitzchak's life, his eyesight had weakened. He summoned Eisav in and told him to prepare a dish for him, in order so that he could bless him and his descendants. Rivkah, hearing this, told Yaakov to go in and impersonate his brother so he would receive the blessings instead. Yaakov agreed, and dressed in sheep fleece so that he would feel like his hairy brother when Yitzchak felt him. Yitzchak fell for the ruse, and blessed Yaakov instead. Just as Yaakov left, Eisav returned, only to find that his blessings had been stolen. Furious, Eisav vowed revenge on Yaakov. Because of this, Rivkah told Yaakov to flee to her brother Lavan's house until Eisav's rage boiled over.

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