



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Toldos 5777

December 2, 2016

A Taste of Torah

Great Expectations

by Rabbi Eli Mozes

Our parsha opens with a compelling drama. Just three years before, it seemed that the future of the Jewish People was meeting an untimely end, as Avraham was about to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice. At the last moment, his life was spared, and three short years later he was married to Rivka. It seemed that the dawn of the Jewish People had arrived. But then they hit a speed-bump. Rivka was barren, incapable of bearing children; from where would arise the Jewish People? Days turned to months turned to years as the silence in their home became deafening. A silence broken only by piercing cries and prayers as they entreated Hashem to bless them with children. Finally, after almost twenty years, their prayers were answered and Rivka was expecting. Words cannot describe the joy which they must have felt; their lives were not in vain, indeed, they would merit to be the founders of Hashem's Chosen Nation.

But it was not so simple. There was something about this pregnancy which wasn't right; something which led Rivka to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever to seek the council of Hashem. Our Sages teach us that Rivka experienced a strange phenomenon. When she passed a study hall, she felt the fetus kicking, trying to get out and study Torah. Yet, when she passed a pagan temple, she felt the very same sensation, of the fetus attempting to get out, to engage in idol worship. This left her concerned and perplexed. Rivka was told by Hashem that there wasn't only one child within her. She was carrying twins; one was saintly while the other was wicked. Both of them would be successful in their own ways, growing to be the founders of great nations.

Rabbi Yehoshua Rokeach of Belz (1825-1894) raises a troubling question. Rivka wasn't a simple woman; she was one of our matriarchs and a prophetess. Couldn't she have figured this out herself? Twins aren't all that uncommon!

There had already been many examples of siblings who were diametrically opposed: Cain and Abel, Shem and Cham, Yitzchak and Yishmael. Rivka herself had a brother Lavan, who was a rather rotten fellow! In fact, the Talmud (Bava Basra 110a) teaches us that most children have the characteristics of the mother's brothers, so Rivka should have expected that some of her children would walk in the footsteps of Lavan. Why the need to go and seek the council of Hashem?

Rabbi Rokeach explains this with an astounding insight. If this would have been a natural pregnancy, Rivka would not have had any questions. Twins are a natural occurrence, and it could well happen that one of her children would tend toward wickedness. What disturbed Rivka was that this was no natural pregnancy; Rivka was physically incapable of bearing children. The term used here for the prayers of Yitzchak is *vaye'etar*, a rarely-used word in the Torah. Rabbeinu Bachya explains, based on a passage in Tractate Succah (14a), that this word is related to a pitchfork (*atar* in Aramaic). Just as a pitchfork turns over the hay, so, too, prayer can overturn nature. This wasn't a natural pregnancy, but, rather, a pregnancy created by the prayers of Yitzchak and Rivka, and Rivka knew that they hadn't asked for an idol-worshipping son. This was what left her flummoxed, and led her to seek the council of Hashem.

The answer she received gives us pause to ponder. She was told that, indeed, you shall be the mother of twins and yes, one will be righteous and the other, wicked. You prayed for a righteous child, one who would be a patriarch of the Jewish Nation? True, but you are missing one important point. The only way to have a child grow to be as great as Yaakov is if he is constantly battling an Eisav, as the literal translation of the verse (Toldos 25:23) bears out, "...and one nation shall become mightier from the other." (See

Stories For The Soul

Voice of Truth

Rochel Schiff lived in Vienna at the turn of the 20th century. She was blessed with a fantastic singing voice, and it didn't take long for an agent to arrive and offer her the opportunity for a lucrative career as an opera singer. Rochel was quite attracted by the opportunity, but a young woman from an observant Jewish family could not embark on such a career; it would likely spell the end of her commitment to Torah and mitzvos.

Rochel's parents did their utmost to dissuade her from pursuing her ambitions, and, eventually, they made their way to Rabbi Yitzchok Meir, the Kapischnitzer Rebbe (1862-1936), who was in Vienna at the time.

"Tell me," said the rebbe to the girl, "why do you want to go into this line of work?"

"I will become famous throughout the world," replied Rochel.

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir closed his eyes for several moments, thinking. He then said to the young woman, "Listen closely, my dear daughter. It is the dream of every young Jewish woman to be blessed with a child who will illuminate the world through his Torah learning. I give you my promise that if you now sacrifice your chance at fame, there will come a time when you will be blessed with a child who will light up the world. Your fame will come, but it will be through him, your son."

The young girl wiped away her tears and thought deeply about the magnanimous promise the rebbe had just made to her. She was a fine, young Jewish girl and so, after considering the offer, she accepted the rebbe's proposal.

This story was discovered by Rabbi

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Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Sunday, Dec. 25th, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15 per child, \$7.50 per adult - includes entire facility; discounted group rates are available before 12/21. Visit www.mazetogether.org to find out how to join for free until 12/23. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

CORPORATION CONUNDRUM AT DEC. 7 T4T

Join Jay Kamlet, Managing Partner, Kamlet LLP, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the limits of corporations. December 7th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What is the reason for the Western European custom of the BaHaB series of Cheshvan being delayed until the second half of the month?

A: According to the Maharil (Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe Levi Moelin, c. 1365 -1427) this was done to ease the fast by delaying it to the shorter days at the end of Cheshvan! Alternately, according to Rabbi Yaakov Weil (a disciple of the Maharil), this was

to correspond these fasts with the period of praying and fasting for rain (see Tractate Ta'anis, Ch. 1), which begins on the 7th of Cheshvan.

(Sources: Maharil, Shabbos Bereishis and Darkei Moshe Orach Chaim 429:4)

This week's question: What is unique about the *haftara* of Parshas Vayetze (according to Ashkenazic custom)?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef Part II

Both Spain as well as the Inquisition placed great pressure upon Portugal to issue its own expulsion order. In December of 1496, their efforts succeeded, and Portugal issued an edict of expulsion stating that the Jews had ten months to convert or depart. Some 150,000 Jews were prepared to leave Portugal, most of them refugees from Spain. However, most of them never had the opportunity to depart on their own terms. In April of 1497, the Church seized thousands of children under the age of fourteen and forcibly baptized them. Many other Jews were sent to various Portuguese

colonies. Yet others were impressed into the Portuguese navy. Many Jews who remained, in the face of the terrible persecution, chose to convert.

Among the Jews who did depart from Portugal were young Yosef and his family. The Caro family settled in Nikopolis (today Nikopol, Bulgaria), then a city in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans were eager to have the expelled Sefardic Jews settle in the areas under their rule, hoping their talents and abilities would bring success and wealth to their realm.

A Taste of Torah

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Rashi *ibid.* for the standard interpretation of the verse.) Precisely the fact that at every step of Yaakov's journey he was being challenged by Eisav and Lavan stimulated his growth to the point where, our Sages tell us, his image is engraved upon the Divine Throne of Glory.

Sometimes we wonder, why does Hashem

have to throw so many challenges into our lives; why can't we just get a break instead of staggering from crisis to crisis? We must realize that it is those quiet times that are the most dangerous; when there is no urgency, we become complacent and slowly atrophy. The path to growth is by facing down our challenges and overcoming them.

Stories For The Soul

Continued from front side

Don Segal in a book recording the events of the Austrian Jewish communities. He followed up to see what occurred later, and discovered that young Rochel later married and had a son who grew up to become the famed Rabbi Shmuel Vosner (1913-2015), one of the greatest halachic authorities of our time.

Rabbi Segal once asked Rabbi Vosner if he knew of the story. Rabbi Vosner replied that while he had never heard this story from his mother,

when he was young, she used to encourage him greatly to pursue his Torah studies, saying, "You cannot imagine what I sacrificed for you."

In this week's parsha, Rivka recognized that it was Yaakov who deserved to receive the blessings from his father Yitzchak. She accepted upon her head any curses that Yaakov might receive were he to be discovered. It is the hallmark of Jewish mothers throughout history to make great sacrifices on behalf of their children.