

לעילוי נשמת

ר' יוסף יהושע בן אברהם שלום (אספלה) ז"ל  
הרב אלכסנדר סנדר בן אברהם (שיזגל) ז"ל

# פרשה בעיון Parsha B'Iyun

Weekly in-depth shiurim delivered in Israel  
by Maggid Hameisharim

**HaRav Baruch Rosenblum שליט"א**

Rav Baruch Rosenblum, a popular maggid shiur in Bnei Brak, has been delivering shiurim to thousands across Israel and the world for over 20 years.

RECEIVE WEEKLY SHIURIM  
VIA WHATSAPP OR EMAIL



WWW.RAVROSENBLUM.ORG



פרשת תולדות תשפ"ד  
TOLDOT 5784

## וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבְּנָיִם בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי Distinguishing Eisav from Yishmael

Produced from the shiur delivered at the Beit Knesset HaGadol in Bnei Brak on ד' כסלו תשפ"ד – November 16, 2023.

Dedicated in the merit of a *refuah shleima* for שמחה בת-אל בת חנה באשה.

Dedicated in the merit of all those killed *Al Kiddush Hashem* - ה"ד; in memory of the heroic *chayalim* who gave their lives defending us - ה"ד; for the *refuah shleima* of all the wounded in body and soul; for the safety and success of the IDF and security forces; for the safe return of those being held in captivity; and for the ultimate redemption of Am Yisrael speedily and with *Rachamim*.

Chazal say, anywhere we find the word *אָלָה*, there is the cessation of a previous idea or story, and a new one begins. The opposite is true as well. Wherever we find the word *וְאֵלָה*, with a *vav hachibur*, there is continuation, and an addition to the previous topic. An example can be found at the start of Parshat Mishpatim:

וְאֵלֶּה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשִּׂים לִפְנֵיהֶם:

And these are the laws that you shall set before them.

**Rashi**<sup>1</sup> famously says, *וְאֵלָה* teaches us that just as the previous commandments in Parshat Yitro were given at Sinai, so, too, the laws that follow were given at Sinai. Our Parsha begins:

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן-אַבְרָהָם אֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק:

And these are the descendants of Yitzchak son of Avraham. Avraham was the father of Yitzchak.

The **Ba'al HaTurim**<sup>2</sup> says, the connection relates to the final pasuk we read last week, dealing with the death of Yishmael. *עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-אֶחָיו נָפַל* – As soon as the kingdom of Yishmael will fall, the kingdom of David will arise.

The grammar in that first pasuk of our Parsha is somewhat peculiar, including repetition of it being Avraham that fathered

Yitzchak. Rashi notes, based on a Midrash (Tanchuma, Toldot 1), the repetition is because the cynics of that time – *לִיֶּצְנֵי הַדּוֹר* – said, "Look at how many years Sarah lived with Avraham without becoming pregnant. She now had the child of Avimelech!" Hakadosh Baruch Hu shaped Yitzchak's facial features exactly similar to those of his father, so that everyone had to admit he was Avraham's son. The repeated statement of *וְאֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק* reflects the proof offered that Avraham fathered Yitzchak.

Since when are we concerned with what the cynics of the generation think or say? We see the same idea during Creation, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu said *וַנִּעְשֶׂה אָדָם* and the angels warned that cynics would say the plural form supports their denial of one G-d having created the world. Hakadosh Baruch Hu shut the angels down, however, telling them to disregard what cynics will one day say, because the lesson from this word *וַנִּעְשֶׂה* is of greater importance than any risk.

Why are we so worried about what clowns around the world will come along and say? And why when it came to Avraham was that theory not dismissed like it was during Creation, but rather, extra words were added to quash conspiracy theories?

The answer is quite simple. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not concerned about what cynics will say about Him and His

name. They can go ahead and open their mouths, as their words are moot and without impact. For his *nevi'im* and *tzadikim*, however, that isn't the case. Speaking negatively about Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu was not tolerated, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu silenced it from the get-go.

I'd now like to dive deeper into this subject and derive from it several important learnings.

In Parshat Vayeira, the Torah tells us a bit more about the *leitzni* הדרור. Yitzchak was twenty-four months old when Avraham threw a feast – ביום הגמל את יצחק – We then read:

וַתֵּרָא שָׂרָה אֶת-בְּנֵי-הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר-יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מִצְחָק:

Sarah saw that the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, that she had born to Avraham, was mocking.

Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno<sup>3</sup> connects this act to the earlier mentioned cynics who suggested Sarah bore Avimelech's child. It was Yishmael who made fun of the big feast Avraham had thrown to mark the weaning of Yitzchak – a party that saw the presence of Shem, Ever, and Avimelech, and was thus called a *great feast*. The presence of Shem and Ever made sense, as they were the *gedolei hador*, but what was Avimelech doing there? Yishmael decided it was due to his paternal connection to the child, and it was then Yishmael who propagated the idea that Sarah had become pregnant from Avimelech.

Sefer **Amudeha Shiva**<sup>4</sup> says the feast was called *great* because Hakadosh Baruch Hu came to the party, proving Yitzchak was Avraham's son. The presence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not found in places of immoral conduct, signalling the virtue of this party and of Yitzchak's birth.

A wonderful question can now be asked. Why was Avimelech on the guest list? This is akin to one of us inviting Rav Kanievsky, Rav Steinman, Rav Ovadia Yosef, Rav Kaduri, and Jimmy Carter to our *Seudat Hoda'a*. It makes no sense! Furthermore, he wasn't invited to the *bris*, so why did Avraham Avinu suddenly invite him to a subsequent party? I found a beautiful answer to this question in a sefer called **Lev Tahor**.

הָלְלוּ אֶת-יְהוָה כָּל-גּוֹיִם שִׁבְחוּהוּ כָּל-הָאֲמִיּוֹת: בֵּי גֹבַר עָלֵינוּ חֲסִדוֹ וְאַמְתוֹתָהּ לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּ-יְיָ:

O Praise the Lord, all you nations: praise him all you peoples. For his love for us is great: and the truth of the Lord endures for ever. Haleluy-a!

What is the meaning of this pasuk found in Hallel? Who recites these verses? It is the nations of the world. They say it in Gaza, and in Qatar, and in Ramallah, and in plenty of other backward places, as there are enemy nations who continuously plan to cause harm to Am Yisrael, but whose plans fail due to technical mishaps. Their explosive devices detonate in their hands and their missiles go off track. Over 10,000 missiles have already been sent our way and *b'chasdei Hashem* we don't see loss of life from them. The launchers of these rockets, *yimach shemam*, will acknowledge Hakadosh Baruch Hu is mercifully protecting

His children at all times despite us not being able to put our finger on any particular act of protection. We cannot see those acts, but the hostile nations certainly do! They try and try again but see only failure after failure! They know the score, and one day will recognize why they were unsuccessful and recite these verses of Tehillim!

The **Brisker Rav**<sup>5</sup> adds, there are two related brachot we recite: בְּרִכּוֹת הַשְּׁבָחָה – *blessings of gratitude*, and בְּרִכּוֹת הַהוֹדָאָה – *blessings of praise*. The former – הטוב והמיטיב – is recited immediately upon receiving good news and good fortune, such as the birth of a son. The latter – שכחו וגבורתו מלא עולם – is recited in praise of Hakadosh Baruch Hu for various phenomenon that occur in the world, such as this past week when it was recited upon the first drops of seasonal rain reaching us. A non-Jew cannot offer gratitude (הוֹדָאָה) to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for goodness received. Only we can do that. A non-Jew, however, can offer praise (שְׁבָחָה), as it says שִׁבְחוּהוּ כָּל הָאֲמִיּוֹת. The Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a) tells us, when Yitzchak was born, the matter was broadcast to the world:

אותו היום שגמל אברהם את יצחק בנו עשה סעודה גדולה היו כל אומות העולם מרננים ואומרים ראיתם זקן וזקנה שהביאו אסופי מן השוק ואומרים בנינו הוא ולא עוד אלא שעושין משתה גדול להעמיד דבריהם

That day when Abraham weaned his son Isaac, he prepared a great celebratory feast. All of the nations of the world were gossiping and saying to each other: See this old man and old woman who brought a foundling from the market and are saying: He is our son, and moreover they are making a great feast to bolster their claim.

If that were the case, Sarah would be unable to nurse the child, and would need to hire a nurse. As soon as she was seen nursing the infant directly, the story was discredited. With that theory no longer holding any weight, the cynics moved on to their next narrative – that it was Avimelech's child Sarah gave birth to. They modified their fictional claim, and it, too, was gobbled up by followers all over. As a result, Avraham made another party at the time of Yitzchak's weaning, when he no longer was nursed by his mother, and he gathered everyone. Shem and Ever would recite a blessing of gratitude – הטוב והמיטיב, but Avraham also invited Avimelech and his entire government, wanting the second bracha – שִׁבְחוּהוּ כָּל הָאֲמִיּוֹת. How would they do so? The Midrash tells us that Avraham invited Avimelech and all his ministers, while Sarah was told to invite all the minister's wives and their children, instructing those with infant children to leave their nurses at home. She was asked to nurse all the children of these wives – היניקה בנים שרה! Sarah was perplexed, as this was not a modest way for her to act. The Midrash tells us Avraham's response (Bereshit Rabbah 53:9):

אמר לה אבינו אברהם אין זו שעת הצניעות אלא גלי את דדיך, כדי שידעו הכל שהתחיל הקדוש ברוך הוא לעשות נסים, גלתה את דדיך והיו נובעות חלב כשני מעינות, והיו משרוניות באות ומיניקות את בניהם ממנה, והיו אומרות אין אנו כדי להניק את בנינו מחלבך של צדקת.

This is not the time for modesty. Instead, expose your

breasts, so that everyone will know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has begun to perform miracles.' She exposed her breasts and they were flowing with milk like two wellsprings. Noblewomen were coming and having their children nurse from her. They were saying: 'We are not worthy of having our children nurse from this righteous woman.'

The narrative of Yitzchak being Avimelech's child was debunked because everyone knew Hakadosh Baruch Hu would not perform miracles that went against the laws of nature – i.e., facilitating one woman to nurse scores of children at one time – if Sarah was not worthy and if she had carried the child of Avimelech. The cynics were once again shut down, and the nations recited G-d's praise.

I'd like to ask a simple question. Look at how many miracles Hakadosh Baruch Hu performed just to quiet the cynics. Why? Why did He not simply quiet them down like we'll read on Chanukah? In Parshat Vayeishev, Yosef was sent to prison in Egypt after being set up by the wife of Potiphar. Headlines were made across the country, and not too dissimilar from our times, the masses took to the streets celebrating the capture of a Jew. Does Yosef HaTzaddik really need to suffer such degradation and embarrassment after running away from sin? Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: "That will be the headline on the eight o'clock news, but at nine there will already be a new scandal that takes over the airwaves around the clock." Rocks were found in the bread of Pharaoh, and bugs in his drink, and two capital cases were opened even before royal teeth could be scooped up from the floor and a spilled drink mopped up. I ask, when the cynics started talking stupidities that Avimelech was the father of the child, could Hakadosh Baruch Hu not instantly distract them with something else?

**Shemen Rosh**<sup>6</sup> provides a nice idea, in the name of the **Vilna Gaon**<sup>7</sup>, to explain why our story played out the way it did with Avraham and Sarah. We'll start with a few short introductions before coming back to this answer.

We'll begin with the section in Vayeira that deals with Sarah conceiving and giving birth to Yitzchak.

וְה' פָקַד אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר וַיַּעַשׂ ה' לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר:

And the Lord visited Sara as He had said, and the Lord did to Sara as He had spoken.

Obvious to all is that the pasuk contains double language, with a shift from אָמַר to דִּבֶּר. As we know from the introductory pasuk to Matan Torah – בַּה תֹּאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – the former is soft speech (לְשׁוֹן רַבּוֹה), and the latter harsh or direct speech (לְשׁוֹן קָשָׁה). The Midrash says, the first half is from Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the latter half from the angel present at the tent. **Shaarei Simcha**<sup>8</sup> answers through Sarah's words that immediately follow:

וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרָה צָחַק עָשָׂה לִי אֱלֹהִים כְּלִי־הַשְּׂמֵעַ יִצְחָק־לִי: וַתֹּאמֶר מִי מִלֵּל

לְאַבְרָהָם הַיְנִיקָה בָּנִים שָׂרָה כִּי־לִדְתִי בֶן לְזָקְנָי:

And Sara said, G-d has made laughter for me, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said to Avraham, that Sara would nurse children? for I have born him a son in his old age.

What does it mean all will laugh with her? **Targum Onklos**<sup>9</sup> says: *G-d has given me gladness, all who hear will rejoice with me.* Here we see it is a matter of *simcha*, whereas earlier, when Sarah was told of a pending child, וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה is interpreted by Onklos as literal laughter – i.e., laughter at the idea proposed.

Shaarei Simcha says, there were numerous aspects of good news that came through the news of Yitzchak coming onto the scene. Hakadosh Baruch Hu promised a child, but nothing more. He didn't promise she would nurse the child in her old age. Yet, she returned to her younger form and not only nursed her son, but all the neighboring children. Miracle after miracle surrounded this news brought to the elderly couple. The **Chatam Sofer**<sup>10</sup> asks, why will only those who hear (כָּל־הַשְּׂמֵעַ) laugh and not those who actually see it with their own eyes? He answers, because they won't have seen her transformation to a younger woman like those who witnessed it, and therefore it will be all the more miraculous. With that, Shaarei Simcha asks, why does it say לִי אֱלֹהִים יִצְחָק, utilizing the name of Hakadosh Baruch Hu corresponding to *Midat HaDin*? According to *Din*, none of this would have ever happened. Only because of *Midat HaRachamim* did all these miracles take place! There are additional questions asked by Shaarei Simcha, but these are the ones we need to help bring us to our point.

When the angel informed Avraham of Yitzchak's impending birth, he said: *I will return to you next year, and Sarah, your wife will have a son*<sup>A</sup>. The words reflect a son will be given to Avraham's wife, Sarah. Immediately afterwards, Sarah laughs at the idea, and we're told similar: *At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time of life, and Sarah will have a son.* What happened to אֶשְׂתֶּךָ in the second pasuk? The first instance contains the description whereas the next refers to Sarah by name only. Why the difference? Let's add another layer to this question. After being informed by the angel, we're told וְשָׂרָה שָׂמְעַת פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וְהוּא אַחֲרָיו – *Sarah was listening at the door of the tent, that was behind him.* Rashi says, the tent opening was behind the angel, but **Targum Yonatan ben Uziel**<sup>11</sup> explains the pasuk differently: Sarah was listening at the door of the tent, while Yishmael stood behind her, taking note of what the angel said! The **Sar Sholom of Belz**<sup>12</sup> says, Sarah laughed because Yishmael was present. She feared that he might overhear and cast an *ayin hara* on her, leading to the loss of her child, similar to what happened to Hagar after Sarah had cast an *ayin hara* on

<sup>A</sup> I read in several weekly Torah publications that what the angel was in essence saying: "Today, you have an animal (חיה) in the house (i.e., Yishmael), but next year there will be a son." I couldn't track down the source, and it is apparently an anonymous *peirush*. It is not correct, but it is endearing nonetheless.

her. She laughed, dismissing the idea so that Yishmael would not think twice about it. If so, why was there a claim against Sarah? Why did her act cause a strong response from Hakadosh Baruch Hu? The answer is, when an angel is sent to promise something, there is no chance or risk of *ayin hara*.

Let's look at one more wonderful piece before reaching the answer as to why Hakadosh handled the cynics the way He did rather than silencing them via quick distraction. When the Torah tells us *למועד אשוב אליך כעת חיה ולשרה בן*, there is a reason the apposite of *אשתך – your wife* is not present.

The **Arizal**<sup>13</sup> says, each of the Avot was married to their opposite – i.e., someone who represented the opposite character trait. [Note: Pesukim are brought to back up each of the following characterizations.] Avraham was *Chesed* and Sarah *Din*. *Chesed* was married to *Din* – but which of these two traits did Yitzchak acquire? The angel tells Avraham that his son will inherit the traits of his mother – *ולשרה בן*. Yitzchak will be purely *Din* and not *Chesed*. If so, his wife will be the opposite trait – Rivkah was *Chesed*. Once again, *Din* with *Chesed*. In this week's Parsha, two sons are born to that couple. Yaacov representing *Chesed*, and Eisav representing *Din*. This is why we're told Yitzchak had a stronger affinity towards Eisav, as they were both *Din*, whereas Rivkah loved Yaacov more, as they were both *Chesed*. Now fast forward to Yaacov and Eisav being ready for marriage. If Eisav is *Din*, he should receive a wife representing *Chesed*, and Yaacov should receive *Din*. A deal was made with Lavan, whereby Leah – representing *Chesed* - is paired with Eisav, and Rachel – representing *Din* – is paired with Yaacov. What happened though? Why was this plan altered? After Avraham Avinu died, Eisav returned from the field tired (והוא עיף), after having committed five major sins including battling and killing Nimrod. He was exhausted and desperately needed something to eat. Yaacov was in the process of making lentils – the food mourners eat after a *levaya* – and Eisav was so energy depleted that he asked Yaacov to feed him. He didn't even have the strength to lift a spoon to his mouth! What did Yaacov do? וַיַּעֲקֵב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וּנְיִיד עֲדָשִׁים – he gave his brother bread and lentil stew. There is only one problem with this meal. Eisav never asked for bread. This was not a fancy restaurant where bread is served on the table as you wait for the main course to arrive. The **Maggid Mi'Dubno**<sup>14</sup> says, if someone is forced to sell an item, he can later invalidate the transaction. A forced sale includes buying food when in a position of such hunger that there is a health risk at play if you don't eat right now. Such a state of *pikuach nefesh* was grounds to negate the sale, and Yaacov recognized Eisav would have the ability to do so and hold onto the *bechora*. Therefore, Yaacov added an appetizer “on the house”. He first served Eisav bread, so that his famished brother are and regained his strength. It wasn't part of Eisav's order nor part of the transaction, but it removed the state of *pikuach nefesh* and ensured that the subsequent dish of lentils would be eaten without coercion and without any chance of their deal being invalidated.

The Arizal continues his explanation. Yaacov worked seven years for the younger daughter, Rachel, but after seven years, Lavan pulled a quick one on him and substituted Leah under the chupah. Yaacov was furious and asked his new bride, “*I called you Rachel all night and you responded. Why did you lie to me? Why did you not tell me you were Leah?*” Leah calmly replied, “*Can I ask you a question? When you received the bracha from your father, did you not tell your father you were the firstborn? I know you're not a liar though. You did so because you acquired the birthright from Eisav. You became Eisav, acquiring his primary trait as well – Din. Din together with Chesed is Tiferet, and this means you need to take two wives – one from Din and one from Chesed.*”

Let's now return to the sefer Shaarei Simcha, which explains the turn of events in a startling way. The angel Michael originally came and proclaimed *והנה בן לשרה אשתך*, but after Sarah laughed, and asked how that could possibly be given their old age, things immediately changed. Hakadosh Baruch Hu asked Avraham why she laughed and why she did not believe anything was possible in the Hands of the Almighty. And He then paid Sarah back, *midah k'neged midah* – measure for measure. *ולשרה בן* – a son from Sarah and not from Avraham's wife, Sarah. People will then laugh and point at her, lobbing harsh accusations that the child came from Avimelech rather than Avraham. She laughed at Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and now she herself would be laughed at.

Returning to the pasuk *וה' פקד את־שרה באשר אמר*, we can now explain why the double language and why a shift from soft speech (אמר) to harsh speech (דבר). That same shift took place from *והנה בן לשרה אשתך* to *ולשרה בן*, and it was all the result of disbelief in the miracles and wonders Hakadosh Baruch Hu can and will perform for us.

Sarah said *לי אֶל־הים עשה לי צחוק*, and the Targum explains the word to mean *simcha* – all will rejoice with her as she received a son and was able to nurse him, etc. Miracle after miracle for everyone to celebrate but attached to the name of Hakadosh Baruch Hu reflecting *Midat HaDin*. How does this add up? It is because she received the gift, via the miracles, but together with pain as well. She laughed when contemplating the possibility of having a child, and the result was the world laughing at her, and pain from it.

We are now ready to explore the idea found in Shemen Rosh (Bereshit Vol. 11, p.176). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 82a) brings forth two pesukim from Malachi (Malachi 2:11-12):

בגדה יהודה ותועבה נעשתה בישראל ובירושלים כי חלל יהודה קדש ה' אשר אהב ובעל בת אל נכר. יכרת ה' לאיש אשר יעשנה ער ועונה (מאלהי) יעקב ומגיש מנחה לה' צבאות.

Yehuda has dealt treacherously, and a disgusting thing has been done in Yisrael and Yerushalayim; for Yehuda has profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved, and has married the daughter of a strange god. The Lord will cut off from the man that does this, all living offspring from the tents of Yaacov, or any to present an offering to the Lord.

The Gemara interprets the verses: If one marries a non-Jew and he is a Torah scholar, he will not have one among his descendants nor one capable of answering questions of the Sages. If he is a priest, he will not have among his descendants a son who sacrifices *korbanot*. He will lose it all, and only bad will stem from it.

Shemen Rosh takes the above Gemara and asks how it was that Pinchas was given permission, as a zealot, to kill Zimri and Casbi. As per this Gemara and its supporting pesukim, the penalty for taking a non-Jew as a wife is not death. A zealot doesn't gain the right to fire bullets at someone they catch driving a car on Shabbat, and similarly here, it would appear Pinchas had no such right. Shemen Rosh says, when a *Beit Din* judges, there are no sentiments or emotions involved. Testimony is testimony, evidence is evidence, and rulings are rulings. If someone is subject to death, they are put to death, regardless of who they are or who their children might be. But when someone acts on their own, according to what is permissible for them to do, they must first consider these other factors. If righteous children will descend from the perpetrator, they may not proceed with execution. וַיִּרְא פִּינְחָס – Pinchas first looked to see who would descend from the transgressors, just as Moshe Rabbeinu did before executing Egyptian – וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיִּרְא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ – Our Parsha, in examining the laughter at Sarah and the questions posed by cynics, also looks forward at descendants. The Parsha opens with:

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם אֲבִירָהּ הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק:

And these are the descendants of Yitzchak son of Avraham. Avraham was the father of Yitzchak.

If we were to go with the premise that Avimelech was the father of Sarah's child, there is no way Yitzchak Avinu could be the descendent. Nothing pure could possibly descend from such a relationship. The *midah* of *Gevurah* could not possibly come from Avimelech.

And now that we have wrapped up our introduction, we're ready to move on to the Parsha! Our third pasuk reads:

וַיַּעֲתַר יִצְחָק לֵה' לִנְכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָהּ הוּא וַיַּעֲתַר לוֹ ה' וַתַּהַר רַבֵּקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ:

And Yitzchak prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rivka his wife conceived. Yitzchak prayed before Hashem across from [opposite] his wife, for she was barren. Hashem granted his prayer and his wife, Rivkah, conceived.

Twenty years after their wedding, she conceived. But there was a tumult in her womb. Twins, with each pulling in a different direction. How did Rivka respond? She went to Shem and Ever, to ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu what this was all about. It seems odd she'd choose that destination though. Why did she not approach her husband, Yitzchak, with the question? Was he not a prophet and had he not just played a key role in the prayers leading to her conceiving? She could have also asked her father-in-law, Avraham! The answer is, she did not want to approach either of them, to spare them the pain of

learning that the child was partially drawn to *Avoda Zarah*, or as it turned out, one of the twins completely down that path.

וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי וַתִּלְךְ לְדַרְשׁ אֶת־ה':

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she inquired of the Lord.

What is it that Rivka wanted? **Rav Osher Weiss shlit"a**, in **Minchat Asher**<sup>15</sup>, says the Mishna in *Eduyot* (2:9) teaches us a father transmits to the son beauty (גוֹי), strength (בְּחָ), and wisdom (חֵכְמָה). We bring children into this world not to create younger bodies that will act as our servants and take care of us as we grow old, but to produce offspring that will sanctify the name of Hakadosh Baruch Hu and serve a higher purpose. The Midrash tell us that Rivka said, "If these children are not going to follow that path, I'd rather not have any." This is the same as Avraham Avinu expressed, as well as David HaMelech. Note: they all did so in the form of Tefilla, and not through action like Chizkiyahu, who did not marry as a result. Rivka prayed for all three elements to be present in her child – נְכַח, which stands for חֵכְמָה. גוֹי. If there is wisdom, it signals that there is also Torah, but if that one element is removed, the remaining attributes are גוֹי, represented in her expression of אִם. If only beauty and strength were present, she didn't want any part in such descendants.

To better explain this idea, I'll briefly summarize what we learned last week. *Sefer Amudeha Shiva* explains the piyut *Eshet Chayil*, with emphasis on the first stanza.

אִשְׁת־חַיִּל מִי יִמְצָא וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מִכְרָהּ: בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בַּעֲלָהּ וְשָׁלָל לֹא יִחָסֵר: גָּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ: דְּרָשָׁה צֹמֶר וּפְשָׁתִים וַתַּעֲשׂ בְּחִפְזָן כְּפִיָּה:

Who can find a woman of worth? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts in her, and he shall have no lack of gain. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeks wool, and flax, and works willingly with her hands.

Sarah Imeinu said to Avraham, "We are here to correct the sin of Adam HaRishon. Just as they had two sons, I am to have two sons. But if they are to be produced together, the same result will occur, with one rising up to kill the other." Sarah presented a new plan to Avraham. He would take another woman and have his first child through her. It would be an Egyptian woman, because Cain is associated with Egypt. The sacrifice he brought was pishtan (flax) which grows at the Nile. His motives were for Pharaoh and Egypt to prevail over Bnei Yisrael, whereas Hevel brought the essence of Bnei Yisrael as his offering in hopes of a different outcome. Avraham would take Hagar, produce Yishmael, and all the *zuhama* – impurity originating at the time of Adam HaRishon's sin – would be discarded through that son. Avraham could then cast him away, leaving the focus on Yitzchak who was a clean and pure descendent, without any flaw whatsoever. Sarah's plan would result in a son, pure from all *psolet* and imperfection, more valuable than gold, silver, and the finest of jewels.

Rivka went to house of Avraham, knowing Sarah had already

died, and learned the deep meaning behind that *hesped* given for her. She was told her husband – Yitzchak – was pure, and walked away believing all her children would follow in his footsteps and be without imperfection. There was not a doubt in her mind there'd be no *psolet* in her offspring. Then, after davening for twenty years – וַיִּתְרַצְצוּ הַבָּנִים בְּקִרְבָּהּ. It was an absolute shock! It was a sign that there was indeed *psolet* present. Why wasn't she told? Had only she known, she, too, would have proceeded with Sarah's plan, and brought a second wife to Yitzchak, allowing the *zuhama* to escape through that avenue. לָמָּה זֶה אֲנֹכִי – Why me, she asked. She would have brought in a maidservant to give birth to Eisav had she known. But Yitzchak could not go down that path, as he was an *Olah Temima* – his purity did not allow for it. Rivka then asked why both sons had to be delivered at the same time. Why could it not be one after the next, with a slight delay in between allowing for one to be cast away. Why did they have to arrive at the same time like Cain and Hevel, setting up a scenario that could end the same way. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to her: תְּשִׁי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנָךְ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ – both of the sons were to be carried together and born at the same time. That is the way Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted it.

Why? Why did it have to play out in that manner? The **Chida**<sup>16</sup> says (Chomat Anakh), with the manner in which Sarah brought Hagar into the picture, and from her came Yishmael who was then cast away, there will never be any converts that come from his descendants. The level of *psolet* is 100%, and nothing can be salvaged there, not from Hamas, not from the Taliban, and not from Hezbollah, *yimach shemam v'zichram*. But from Eisav, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted there to come converts. That is why He connected Eisav to Yaacov. In order to connect תּוֹרַת שְׁבַע־פָּה and תּוֹרַת שְׁבַבְתָּב.

Wait. Excuse me? Did the Chida say that our two parts of our Torah would be connected through Yaacov and Eisav? The answer is yes! תַּתֵּן אֶמֶת לַיַּעֲקֹב – the Written Torah is through Yaacov Avinu. וַיֵּאָהֵב יַצְחָק אֶת-עֵשָׂו כִּי צִיד בָּפִיו – The Arizal says Yitzchak loved Eisav because צִיד בָּפִיו, he'd ask tremendous questions. Yitzchak saw that the entire Oral Torah would come from the mouth of Eisav. Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of Eisav! Rabbi Meir too! Shamaya and Avtalyon! Ben Bag Bag and Ben Heh Heh as well! And there are many more on that list! Had Rivka enacted a plan to discard Eisav, the track of the Oral Torah would not have developed as it did.

The Rebbe of Komarov says, when it says וְאֵלֶּה תִּלְדֹת יִשְׁמַעֵאל it does so with two *vav*'s missing in the word תִּלְדֹת. Why is this? Because Yishmael has nothing before and nothing after. *Gornisht mit gornisht*. There is nothing to look for there.

The **Ba'al HaTanya**<sup>17</sup>, as brought down in **Megadim Chadashim**<sup>18</sup>, clarifies slightly, adding that it does not mean there are no converts whatsoever. What it means is that only once every *Shmitah* (seven years), and by sheer chance, it will happen. Someone tried to tell me that this is why during the *Shmitah* year, we turn to the produce of Bnei Yishmael. Needless to say, I don't think so.

The Chida adds (Penei David, Vezot Haberacha 4), ה' מְסִינֵי בָּא – G-d came from Sinai. וְזָרַח מִשְׁעִיר לָמוֹ – from Se'ir (Edom/Eisav) it began dark as they refused the Torah, but then sprouted forth some light as righteous scholars emerged. הוֹפִיעַ מִהַר פָּאָרָן – from Paran though (the wilderness of Yishmael), it began with a small amount of light but then quickly went dark, with nothing ever coming from that source.

The Gemara says (Succah 52b), there are four creations that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created but regretted, as they do more harm than good: גְּלוּת (exile), כַּשְׂדִּים (Chaldeans), יִשְׁמַעְאֵלִים (Ishmaelites), and יֵצֶר הָרָע (evil inclination). Why the Ishmaelites? The **Mareh** says (Yerushalmi Ta'anit), because from Edom came scholars, but nothing ever came from Yishmael.

Let's add one more nice idea from Megadim Chadashim. The Gemara (Bava Batra 73b) recounts how Rabba bar bar Hana once took a Sinai tour with an Ishmaelite, who offered to show him some highlights. The first stop was at the מַתֵּי מִדְבָּר – those who died in the wilderness. They were lying on their backs, and Rabba bar bar Hana cut one corner of the *techelet* garment (tzitzit) to take home with him as proof of an opinion. Suddenly though, the camel couldn't walk. The Arab camel driver asked if anything was touched and promptly instructed his passenger to return everything to its original place. The camel was miraculously healed. From there they went to the spot at which Korach and his entourage were swallowed. The camel driver told Rabba bar bar Hana to put his ear to the ground, where he heard a distinct sound – the chanting of מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אָמַת. The **Maharsha**<sup>19</sup> asks, how is it that this Arab driver clearly knew of these places, and witnessed these vivid miracles, yet never converted to Judaism? Megadim Chadashim says it is simple. Yishmael, even if they saw *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, would not convert. They came from *psolet* and their destiny remains as such.

Eisav on the other hand, when combined with and connected to Yaacov, produces Rabbi and Antoninus. The Gemara relates many stories of the great friendship between Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and the Roman Emperor, Antoninus, who'd secretly visit Rabbi's house in order to learn Torah from him, and eventually converting. The **Megaleh Amukot**<sup>20</sup> says, Rabbi was actually a *gilgul* of Yaacov Avinu, and Antoninus a *gilgul* of Eisav.

Avraham Avinu heard from Sarah Imeinu that Yishmael was מְצַחֵק – mocking, and he was instructed by her to cast them away. He did not feel good about that plan, however, but was told by Hakadosh Baruch Hu to listen to his wife. Why did he need Sarah's direction? Were Yishmael's sins not grave enough for Avraham to act on his own? The Chatam Sofer says, he heard from his father, that inheritance should not be passed from son to son. Not even from an evil son to a good one, as the evil son may himself have sons who are good in their ways. This was the argument between Sarah and Avraham. Sarah did not want to give any inheritance to Yishmael, but Avraham thought perhaps good sons would descend from him and therefore inheritance should be given.

"Listen to Sarah" – Hakadosh Baruch Hu confirmed Sarah's position, which was derived from *Ruach Hakodesh*. Sarah brought Hagar into the picture because she saw clearly that no good descendants would sprout, and it was their chance to cast away all the impurity from the sin of Adam HaRishon and ensure their son Yitzchak remained pure without imperfection. If nothing good would ever come from Yishmael, there was no need to give him any inheritance. The debate between Sarah and Avraham was whether any righteous converts would descend from Yishmael, and the debate was settled.

I'd like to draw one conclusion from this entire shiur. When Avraham was asked by Hakadosh Baruch Hu why Sarah laughed, the **Ramban**<sup>21</sup> asks, what is the exact question or challenge here?

ההקב"ה האשים אותה לאברהם למה היה הדבר נמנע בעיניה וראוי לה שתאמין או שתאמר "אמן בן יעשה ה'"

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu accused her to Avraham, why should the thing be impossible in her eyes, and it would be fitting that she believe or say "Amen, let G-d do so."

The case against Sarah was that she didn't buy in. **Rav Yerucham Mi'Mir**<sup>22</sup> (Da'at Torah) adds an analogy. Picture for yourself that a poor person shows up at someone's door, and after being fed properly, the elderly woman of the house comes with an envelope of cash for them to have. The poor person responds with a *bracha*, "You should be blessed in the coming year to have a beautiful child!" The woman knows full well that the time has passed, but if she does not respond "Amen, so should Hashem do," her verdict is that of a *koferet*

– one who denies Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His powers. Sarah didn't say Amen, and there should be no difference in reaction regardless of one's age or state.

Is that really a lack of faith? One would not think so, but what it demonstrates to us is just how much Hakadosh Baruch Hu wishes for us to believe in Him, even when there is not a shred of logic or reason in the matter. Everything is possible with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That is what we must believe! Just like Bnei Yisrael, who were stuck between the water on one side and the armed Egyptian army on the other. They needed to believe in order to see redemption.

In this month of Kislev we must strengthen our *Emunah*. The sign (*mazal*) of this month is the *keshet* – the bow. Do you know whose sign the bow is? Yishmael! The Midrash says he was born with a bow and lives with a bow! We, Am Yisrael, don't rely on the bow. We know how to use it, *Baruch Hashem*, but our true *keshet* is found in our mouths. It is our Tefillah! That is our power!

We're in a month fit for miracles, a month where Hakadosh Baruch Hu delivered the mighty into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the holy, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the insolent into the hands of those who cling to Torah. Thirteen against an army and we were victorious!

May the power of Tefillah assist us once more, and may we witness the lighting of the Menorah in the rebuilt Beit Hamikdash this coming Chanuka! And may the light of *simcha* shine in every home of Bnei Yisrael! ◇

<sup>1</sup> **Rashi** - R' Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105), Troyes, France. "Rabban Shel Yisrael" - The great Rishon who wrote commentary on all areas of Torah.

<sup>2</sup> **Ba'al HaTurim** - Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1269-1343), Spain; Composer of Arba'ah Turim, tracing Halacha from the Torah through Talmud and early Poskim. Many commentaries were written on the Tur, including R' Yosef Karo's "Beit Yosef" which formed the basis of the Shulchan Arukh.

<sup>3</sup> **Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno** - R' Ovadiah ben Ya'akov Seforno (1470-1550), Italy; In his Tanach commentary, often cites rabbinic statements to address philosophical as well as textual issues, and offers many novel interpretations rooted in these traditions. Admired for his wide knowledge by Henry II, King of France, to whom he sent a Latin translation he prepared of his philosophical work, Or Amim.

<sup>4</sup> **Amudeha Shiva** - Rabbi Betzalel Ben Shlomo (1640-1691) Kobrin, Belarus; Always known as Amudei Shiva - "The Seven Pillars".

<sup>5</sup> **Brisker Rav** - Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959), Brisk, Yerushalayim; The Gry'z of Brisk. Son of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik.

<sup>6</sup> **Shemen Rosh** - Rav Asher Anshel Katz shlit"א, Boro Park, NY; Assumed the position of Viener Rebbe in 1992 after the previous rebbe, Rav Ezriel Yehuda Lebovics, was niftar. Since then, the Rebbe has transformed the kehilla into a large chassidus with multiple Viener shuls in Boro Park, and has published numerous volumes of shiurim delivered on Torah, Pirkei Avot, and Yom Tovim.

<sup>7</sup> **Vilna Gaon** - (The Gra) R' Eliyahu ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-1797), Vilnius,

Poland, Lithuania. Foremost leader of misnagdic Jewry of the past few centuries. Considered the father of the stream of Lithuanian Kabbalah, and remembered as a leader of the opposition to the Hasidic movement.

<sup>8</sup> **Shaarei Simcha** - Rabbi Simcha Bunim Sofer-Schreiber (1842-1906), Bratislava, Pressburg, Frankfurt; Known as the "Shevet Sofer". Son of the Ketav Sofer and grandson of the Chatam Sofer. When his father passed away in 1871, he was appointed the head of the Pressburg yeshiva and chief rabbi of Bratislava. He reorganized the yeshiva and the elementary school, engaged in political struggles with the Neolog movement and worked intensively on Talmud commentaries, numerous responsa and other works.

<sup>9</sup> **Targum Onklos** - According to tradition, written by a Roman convert to Judaism who lived in the first or second century.

<sup>10</sup> **Chatam Sofer** - R' Moshe Sofer of Pressburg (1785–1835), Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Ukraine.

<sup>11</sup> **Targum Yonatan ben Uziel** - Aramaic translation to Nevii'im; One of 80 tannaim who studied under Hillel HaZaken during era of Roman rule.

<sup>12</sup> **Sar Sholom of Belz** - R' Sholom Rokeach (1781-1855), Galicia; First rebbe of the Belz dynasty. Orphaned at a young age, he was brought up by his uncle, Rabbi Yissachar Ber, the Rabbi of Skol. The fire of his Chasidut was nurtured by his mentors, the Chozeh of Lublin, R' Yehoshua Heshel of Apta, the Maggid of Koznitz, and R' Uri of Strelisk. He built a four-story synagogue with a capacity of 5,000 in Belz which was inaugurated in 1843. the spiritual center for tens of thousands of Belzer chasidim in Galicia.

<sup>13</sup> **Arizal** - Ari HaKadosh, Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572), Yerushalayim, Egypt, Tzefat; Considered the forefather of modern Kabbalah.

<sup>14</sup> **Maggid Mi'Dubno** - R' Yaakov ben Wolf Krantz of Dubno (1741-1804), Vilna; By the age of twenty became the darshan of his city. From there he began preaching through the cities around Lublin in Poland, finally settling in Dubnow. His reputation as an outstanding maggid spread, bringing him in contact with the great rabbis of the period, including the Vilna Gaon. The majority of his works were in homiletics, using stories and parables to transmit deeper ethical and moral teachings.

<sup>15</sup> **Minchat Asher** - Rav Osher Weiss shlit"א, Yerushalayim; Posek, Rosh Kollel of Machon Minchas Osher L'Torah V'Horaah, and author of the Minchas Osher. He grew up in a Klausenberger hasidic family in Borough Park, Brooklyn.

<sup>16</sup> **Chida** - R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai (1724-1806), Jerusalem, Africa, and Europe; Jerusalem born scholar and pioneer in the publication of Jewish religious writings. Elected in 1755 to become an emissary for the small Jewish community in Israel; would travel around Europe extensively, making an impression in every Jewish community that he visited.

<sup>17</sup> **Ba'al HaTanya** - The Alter Rebbe - R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of Chabad Chasidism. Disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch. Composed Shulchan Arukh HaRav. Author of Tanya, a highly influential presentation of chasidic philosophy drawing heavily on Kabbalah.

<sup>18</sup> **Megadim Chadashim** - R" Dovid Yoel Weiss shlit"א, Yerushalayim.

<sup>19</sup> **Maharsha** - R' Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), Poland. Wrote commentary on the Talmud, named Chiddushei Halachot, and commentary on the aggadot of the Talmud, named Chiddushei Aggadot. Married the daughter of Edel Lifschitz of Posen and the late Brisker Rav. His mother-in-law supported his Yeshiva for over 2 decades, and in appreciation he adopted her name. Also served as rav in Chelm, Lublin, Tiktin and Ostroh.

<sup>20</sup> **Megaleh Amukot** - R' Natan Nota Spira, (1585–1633), Poland. Chief Rabbi of Krakow. Descendant of a rabbinical family which traced its lineage as far back to Rashi. Megaleh Amukot is a commentary containing 252 explanations of Moshe's prayer referenced in the first pasuk of Vaetchanan.

<sup>21</sup> **Ramban** - Nachmanides – R' Moshe ben Nachman (1194-1270), Girona, Spain, Akko; A leading Torah scholar of the middle-ages who authored commentaries on Torah and the Talmud. He was a posek who wrote responsa and stand-alone works on Halachic topics, as well as works on mysticism, science and philosophy. Immigrated to Israel at age 72 and settled in Akko.

<sup>22</sup> **Rav Yerucham Mi'Mir** - Rav Yerucham Levovitz (1875-1936), Minsk, Belarus, Slobodka, Kelm; Known as "The Mashgiach". A disciple of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, and Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv of Kelm. R' Yerucham was the spiritual leader of the Mir Yeshiva in Belarus until his death in 1936. His disciples were said to have followed his every word, never doing anything that they felt he would not want them to do. Most of the leaders of the yeshivas of inter-war Poland were his disciples.