

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

ואברם כבד מאד במקנה

“And Avram was very laden with livestock...” (13:2)

Torah study is different from other occupations. A person can work at other jobs only when he is young and healthy, not when he is old or sick. Torah, however, protects and provides honor for a person in his youth, and continues to provide reward and benefit even in his old age, even if he is no longer able to learn then. *Avram* studied and kept the Torah, and our verse tells us that *Avram*, who was at this time relatively young, was blessed with great riches. His Torah provided for him even in his old age, as we are told, *And Avraham was old...and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything.* (Teachings of the Talmud, Yerushlami, Kiddushin 4:12)

ואעשר לגוי גדול

“And I will make you into a great nation.” (12:2)

The word “*gadol*” – *great*, may be interpreted in two different senses: greatness in number (*numerous*) and greatness in stature (*prestigious*). When G-d told *Avraham* that He was going to make him – *Avraham* – into a great nation, the intention must have been the second of these two possible meanings, for it was impossible for *Avraham himself* (without including his descendants) to achieve greatness in number. It was indeed true, however, that *Avraham* did reach such prominence in his new land that he *himself* achieved the status of being considered “a great (*prestigious*) nation.”

In the *Pesach Haggadah* the same thought is expressed. In interpreting the Torah’s phrase, “*And [Israel] became a great (gadol) nation*” (*Devarim* 26:5), the *Haggadah* comments: “This teaches that the people of Israel were distinguished in Egypt,” interpreting the word *gadol* as referring to prestige and not to numerousness. (Brisker Rav)

ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר בר כל משפחת האדמה

“And I will bless those who bless you and those who curse you I will curse; and all the families of the land will bless themselves with you.” (12:3)

QUESTION: Since Hashem told *Avram* that *all* families will bless themselves to have children like him, who will be “*mekallelcha*” – “*the ones who will curse you*”?

ANSWER: Hashem was telling *Avram* that his mission was to go into the world and spread *Yiddishkeit*. There would be many people who would join him and bless him for teaching them about Hashem. As usual, he would come across people who would oppose him and even curse him. “Do not become frightened and abandon your mission,” said Hashem, “because even those people

who openly curse and oppose you will envy you deep down in their hearts and pray that their children should be like you when they grow up.” (Sfas Emes)

שרה אשתך יולדת לך בן וקראת שמו יצחק

“Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall call him Yitzchak.” (17:19)

QUESTION: The name *Yitzchak* is because of the laughter (*Rashi*). Why was the future tense (*he will laugh*) used for his name?

ANSWER: *Avraham* and *Sarah* had undertaken the difficult task of changing the course of the world by educating people about Torah and Godliness. They had encountered great difficulties to the extent that *Avraham* was cast into the burning furnace by *Nimrod*.

As *Avraham* and *Sarah* aged and remained childless, those who previously feared them began to laugh and rejoice. “Soon *Avraham* and *Sarah* will die,” they thought to themselves, “and without a child to continue their work, they will be gone and forgotten, and so will the ideas and ideals they propagated.” *Avraham* was concerned about this and prayed to Hashem for a child who would continue the work he had started. Hashem promised him, “Your wife will bear you a son. Name him *Yitzchak* because he will follow in your footsteps, and ‘*he will laugh*’ at all those who think that the efforts of *Avraham* and *Sarah* will go to waste and be forgotten.” (*Vedebarta Bam*)

בעצם היום הזה נמול אברהם וישמעאל בנו

“On this day Avraham and his son Yishmael were circumcised.” (17:26)

QUESTION: According to the two preceding verses, *Avraham* was 99 years old and *Yishmael* was 13 years old when they were circumcised. Thus, the entire verse seems to be a redundancy.

ANSWER: In *Parshat Vayeira*, we learn about the angels who visited *Avraham* on the third day following his *brit*. That day happened to be *Pesach* (*Rashi* 19:3). Thus, *Avraham’s brit* took place three days before *Pesach*. A second opinion is recorded according to the *Da’at Zekeinim MiBa’alei HaTosfot* that the *brit* took place on *Yom Kippur*.

A *brit* of a Jewish boy, which takes place on the eighth day after he is born, can be performed on any day of the week including *Shabbat*. If the *brit* takes place after the eighth day, it cannot be done on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* and according to some opinions, it also cannot be done three days before *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* due to the difficulties that are usually experienced on the third day after the *brit* (*Yoreh Dei’ah* 266:14).

Thus, the question may be asked, since the *britim* of *Avraham* and *Yishmael* were not on the eighth day after birth, why were they performed on *Yom Tov* (*Yom Kippur*) or three days before the *Yom Tov* of *Pesach*? To answer this, the Torah emphasizes that the *britim* of *Avraham* and *Yishmael* took place on **this very day** when Hashem commanded them. Since it was the day on which *Avraham* received the command, it was equivalent to a *brit* that is performed at the proper time (eighth day) and that can be done on any day of the week. (*Yalkut HaDerush*)