

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.

לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביר אל הארץ אשר אראך

“Go for yourself from your land, and from your birthplace to the land that I will show you.” (12:1)

Sequentially, a person first leaves his father’s house, then his birthplace, and finally his homeland. The verse, however, lists each departure not in order of precedence, but in increasing order of difficulty for *Avraham*. Leaving one’s land of residence is difficult, even more so if its his birthplace. Leaving one’s family is the hardest of all. The Torah writes it in this order to show the greatness of *Avraham’s* love for Hashem and how much he was willing to sacrifice for Hashem.

(Ramban)

ואעשר לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה

“And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you shall be for a blessing.” (12:2)

Rashi writes that each of the three phrases in this verse refers to each of the phrases in the *Amidah* – G-d of *Avraham*, G-d of *Yitzchak*, and G-d of *Yaakov*. While the term G-d of *Yitzchak* was clearly a great blessing for *Avraham*, signifying that his son would follow in his spiritual footsteps, how was G-d of *Yaakov* a magnification of *Avraham’s* name?

Often a son is religious only to please his father or avoid his wrath, not out of conviction. Once he leaves home, he will not transmit these “burdensome” traditions to his own children. Conversely, by perpetuating Jewish tradition, one implies that his father was an inspiring and loving personality. Thus, the true magnification of *Avraham’s* reputation as a great teacher comes with the third generation, *Yaakov*, whose greatness testifies to his grandfather’s.

(Rabbi Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik)

Alternatively, we can answer this question numerically: There are 13 Hebrew letters in יעקב, יצחק, and אברהם, and 13 Hebrew letters in רחל, רבקה, שרה. Together, then, the letters of the patriarchs and matriarchs total 26, the *gematria* of G-d’s holiest name, יהוה – י – ה – ו – ה. In this calculation, it might seem more appropriate to use *Yaakov’s* loftier, G-d given name, *Yisrael*. But this would raise the total to 7, unless we reduce *Avraham*, to his original *Avram*. Thus, when we say G-d of *Yaakov*, not *Yisrael*, we truly magnify *Avraham’s* name!

(Rabbi Shimshon Ostropoli)

ואברכה מברכך ומקללך אאר

“And I will bless those who bless you and he who curses you I will curse...” (12:3)

Why does the text not read: “*And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you?*” To show that while Hashem regards a good thought as equal to the deed, He does not regard an evil thought as equal to an evil deed. Those who bless *Avraham* will be blessed for their good intention even before they demonstrate their friendship, but those who wish to curse him will be cursed only after they have put their evil desire into action, and not before. (Kli Yakar)

בלעדי רק אשר אכלו הנערים וחלק האנשים אשר הלכו אתי הם יקחו חלקם

“I am excluding myself, only what the young men have eaten and the portion of the men who went with me...they may take their portion.” (14:24)

By saying “*Biladai – I am excluding myself,*” *Avraham* meant that only he would not benefit from the King of *Sedom* – *even a thread or a shoelace*. But he did not impose this stringency on those who had come with him. They could *take their portion*. This teaches us that while a person is allowed to accept a stringency upon himself, he may not force others to adopt it. (Chafetz Chaim)

שרה אשתך יולדת לך בן וקראת שמו יצחק

“Your wife Sarah will hear 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)

SHABBAT SHALOM

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