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Toldot | Faith in the Sages: Submitting One's Understanding to Torah Wisdom

MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

פרשת תולדות | אנגלית

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Toldot

Locking The Door to a Guest?!

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein recounted the following story:¹

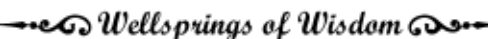
When Rabbi Aharon Kotler, of blessed memory, was serving as the head of the Kletzk Yeshiva in Lithuania, he once needed to travel to America to raise funds to support the yeshiva. While he was in the United States, a meeting was scheduled for him on a Friday with a certain wealthy man. However, due to various delays, Rabbi Aharon was running late on the way, and behold—Shabbat was about to begin, and he found himself in a small, unfamiliar town.

From the faces he saw in the streets, the Rosh Yeshiva understood that he would not find many Jews there. But since there is no place in the world without Jews, presumably a few Jews lived

even in that town—he just needed to find out where they were.

One passerby pointed out to Rabbi Kotler a house where a Jew lived. Rabbi Aharon knocked on the door and asked if he could stay there for Shabbat. The man answered him, “I would gladly host you, but since you are an observant Jew, I should inform you that you won’t be able to eat in my home. My kitchen is entirely non-kosher...”

The Rosh Yeshiva was shocked, and he asked the homeowner if there was another Jew in town whose home had kosher food. The man answered yes, but he noted to the Rabbi, “Be aware that although in that house they eat only strictly kosher meat, there’s another problem... they don’t like having guests!



1. *Aleinu LeShabeach* (Devarim II, p. 580).

I've lived here for many years, and I don't recall even a single time they ever practiced hospitality..."

The Rosh Yeshiva still asked to see that house, and the man repeated, "It's a waste of my time and yours." But Rabbi Kotler insisted, and before long, he found himself knocking on the door of that very house.

The door opened, and in the entrance stood a bearded Jew with a radiant face. "Yes, what do you want?" he asked.

Rabbi Kotler replied, "To stay with you for Shabbat!"

The smile disappeared from the man's face, and he declared, "I do not host guests in my home!" and shut the door.

Rabbi Aharon knocked again, and the homeowner opened the door. The Rosh Yeshiva explained that he had ended up here by chance and had nowhere to spend Shabbat. But the homeowner responded curtly that he didn't usually allow guests and closed the door again...

And so it went the third and fourth times as well...

When Rabbi Kotler saw how things were going, he glanced at his watch and saw that Shabbat was only a few minutes away; he decided to speak to the homeowner harshly.

He knocked for the fifth time, and when the homeowner opened, Rabbi Aharon shouted at him: "Do you think I am a young lad?! I am the Rosh Yeshiva of Kletzk in Lithuania, a respected leader, and how dare you refuse to admit me into your home as Shabbat is about to begin?!"

When the homeowner heard this, he changed his attitude, brought him into the house, and said: "If you are a Rosh Yeshiva, why didn't you say so the first time? I would have treated you differently."

But even then, the "admission process" for hospitality was not over yet. "If you say you're a Rosh Yeshiva, I want to test you..."

Rabbi Aharon recounted that the homeowner tested him with

Parshat Toldot - Locking The Door to a Guest?!

five questions, each more difficult than the last. He was able to answer four of them immediately. And regarding the fifth question, he later related: “If G-d had not helped me to answer, I would have remained outside the house... It was a question about an obscure *Tosefta*, and a short time before I left for America, G-d arranged for me to study it; that’s why I knew the answer...”

From the moment he entered the man’s house—and the man, it turned out, was himself very wealthy—the two of them did not stop conversing in words of Torah. Rabbi Aharon discovered before him an extraordinary Torah scholar, modest and humble beyond words, righteous and G-d-fearing, adorned with every virtue and good character trait.

“I did not find such a genius anywhere in Europe,” Rabbi Kotler later told his students.

So as not to spoil the atmosphere, Rabbi Aharon did not want to bring up throughout the entire Shabbat the great question that nagged at his mind: why the

great mitzvah of hospitality was not observed in that home.

It came to pass on Saturday night, when he began to pack his belongings and prepared to depart, the illustrious guest laid out his question before the homeowner and asked him to explain his strange behavior.

The man took him over to the bookcase, pulled out a volume of the Rambam (Maimonides’ *Hilchot De’ot* 6:1), opened it, and began to read:

“It is man’s nature to be drawn in his opinions and actions after his friends and companions and to behave according to the customs of the people of his land. Therefore, a person must attach himself to the righteous and sit near the sages at all times in order to learn from their deeds, and distance himself from the wicked who walk in darkness so as not to learn from their deeds”.

“I came to this town for a medical need, and therefore, I have to live here. However, because the atmosphere here is very

Parshat Toldot - A Transformation in the Blink of an Eye

materialistic and permissive, and I am afraid I might be influenced by it, I decided to separate myself from the ‘world’...”

“And furthermore,” the homeowner continued, “since this town is situated at a crossroads, it is frequented by

travelers. A number of such guests have come to my home who embodied a powerful spirit of mockery regarding all that is sacred and pure. From that time on, I resolved unequivocally to lock the door of my house to guests...”

A Transformation in the Blink of an Eye

Rabbi Shlomo Levinstein related the following story:²

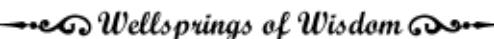
One of the remarkable Jews who became known for their exceptional love for the Jewish people and their caring dedication to benefiting the Jewish community—both spiritually and materially—was the righteous Gaon Rabbi Nissim Yagen, of blessed memory.

Many people would gather at his home to receive his blessing. One day, among those who came appeared a youth who was just twelve years old.

He was a gentle-souled boy, with a black kippah resting

naturally on his head and black *peiyot* (sidelocks) curling beside his ears. He stood there alone, waiting quietly for his turn. With a more discerning, deeper look, one could detect the fear in his eyes and the evident hope in his heart.

Rabbi Yagen did not understand how he could help him. But once the door closed behind them, the boy fixed his gaze and his eyes filled with innocence and pain. “Maybe the Rav can help my father? He desecrates the Shabbat and has decided to leave us and travel to Germany... Maybe it’s possible, please, to bring my father back to repentance?” The words were



2. *U'Matok HaOr* (Vayikra II, p. 138).

barely audible, but the cry shook the heart—*Maybe ? Please ?*

Rabbi Yagen, filled with compassion for the little one before him, said simply: “I will try—just tell him to come to me.”

The boy gave a little laugh in response: “Come here ? If my father knew I came here, he might beat me, and the Rav is asking that I bring him ?”

“How did you become religious ?” the Rav asked, beginning to size up the boy and the strength of his spirit.

“I simply went to *Yeshivat Porat Yosef* in Katamon, registered myself, and came regularly on my own,” the boy answered matter-of-factly as if describing an ordinary occurrence.

Rabbi Nissim gently patted his cheek, rose from his seat, handed him a bundle of books and a *siddur* (prayer book) as a gift, and saw him out with a promise to fulfill his request—while extracting from him a promise that he would return to him anytime he needed anything.

The boy left, and the Rav, agitated and moved, picked up the telephone receiver and dialed the number the young boy had given him.

“Hello, Mr. Shabtai ? Rabbi Yagen speaking...”

The man’s voice that came through the receiver sounded rough and coarse: “Yes, what do you want ?”

Only now did the Rav realize that he actually had no idea what to say to this unfamiliar gentleman. He felt that Heaven suddenly put the following words into his mouth: “Listen, sir, I work here in the yeshiva very hard, and I urgently need someone to help me. Would you perhaps be willing to do that ?”

Mr. Shabtai—the stranger—didn’t even ask how the distinguished Rabbi Yagen knew of him. He was so happy about the job offer that had come his way that he immediately added—before the Rav could change his mind: “I have lots of certificates; I’m a carpenter, and also a secretary, and also a

plumber... and I'm actually looking for work right now."

It was both intriguing and suspicious at the same time, but Rabbi Nissim said: "All right. Take a taxi and come here as soon as possible."

A few minutes later, a man with long hair, oddly dressed, came in through the office door and began spreading out on the table all of the certificates he had: carpenter, plumber, electrician, secretary... It turned out that he had been working in Lebanon in recent years and had found himself in mortal danger, and he now chose to go far away to Germany to try his luck there.

Quickly, the Rav led him to finalize an agreement, the terms of which were that the man's wages would be paid each week in exchange for work on behalf of the yeshiva, and whenever there was no work for him, he would go up to the study hall and learn with the Rav's father. And to afford him the opportunity to see and become familiar with the daily prayers, the Rav asked him to report to work each day at 6:30 in the morning.

He arrived on the first day, dragging a heavy toolbox behind him into the middle of the *beit midrash* (study hall). When the prayer began, he cowered in his place, embarrassed. Rabbi Nissim signaled to someone who came and placed *tefillin* on him. When everyone finished praying, the man approached to ask what he should do now.

"I don't have any work for you at the moment," the Rav answered. "In the meantime, sit down and study."

On the third day, childish knocking was again heard on the door of the Rav's room. The dark-eyed little boy stood there, his eyes wide with great hope: "Kvod HaRav (honored Rabbi), has there been any progress with my father? Did he go to Germany yet?"

"My dear sweet child," Rabbi Nissim said to him, with all the love in the world in his eyes, "what would you say if I told you that your father—who was about to travel to Germany and leave you because of his preference to

violate the Sabbath—is learning right now here in my *kollel*? You don't believe me? Come and see with your own eyes!"

They went and peeked in through the large windows. The father was clearly visible inside, swaying over the large *shtender* (lectern) and discussing an issue with those sitting beside him.

A stifled sob was heard beside Rabbi Nissim. He embraced the pure child and wept together with him for joy over the miracle unfolding before their eyes.

"Do you want to say hello to your father?" Rabbi Nissim asked. The boy shook his head *no*, and within a few minutes, he had vanished from the area.

Five days later, the boy's father came down from the *beit midrash* and asked the Rav if there still wasn't any faucet broken in the yeshiva...

"You'll get your salary," the Rav reassured him, "even if you haven't done anything. Don't worry. But why are you wearing

a child's kippah that doesn't fit the size of your head?"

Somewhat embarrassed, the man felt the kippah on his head, and Rabbi Nissim quickly handed him a new kippah in its place.

"Today during the *Kriyat Shema*," the Rav continued, "you said along with everyone... 'and they shall make for themselves *tzitzit*.' What do you think—whom is the Holy One, blessed be He, referring to? Arabs or Christians, maybe?"

"Of course, to us, the Jewish people," the man replied laughingly. He wrapped himself, as if captivated in a dream, in a new *tallit* that the Rav handed him. He recited the blessing "...to don the *tzitzit*" and then added the *Shehecheyanu* blessing. Rabbi Nissim gently fastened the buttons of his shirt and gave him a pair of *tefillin* as well. Not much time passed, and a new young Torah scholar had joined as an ordinary student, becoming one of the budding members of the *kollel*. The little boy's wish had come true.

Later on, we will connect this story to our weekly Torah portion.

For now, with your permission, let us begin our talk...

The First Light To Shine

At the very beginning of everything, before any creature was created, it was G-d's blessed will to create a nation that would serve Him sincerely and with a whole heart.

However, because He wanted the service to be genuine—service borne out of struggle and conflict—He, therefore, created His world in such a way that it contained two realities: one reality of holiness, and another reality of impurity.

After that, He created man, placed him in the Garden of Eden, and commanded him: “Do not eat from the Tree of Knowledge!”

Adam, the first man, did not hold out and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. From that

grievous event, the souls from the two realities became intermixed, and both holy souls and impure souls began to emerge into the world. The chaos this created was terrible...

Only in the year 1948 from Creation, G-d decided to begin the rectification of His world, and He lowered from the supernal heavens an elevated, radiant soul—the soul of our forefather Abraham. It was he who began the work of refining the “branch” of souls.

The work of Abraham, our forefather, is mentioned for the first time at the end of *Parashat Noach*, and afterward, it continues at length in *Parashat Lech-Lecha*. We will skip over that and go straight to *Parashat Vayera*...

The Emergence of Isaac

Parashat Vayera (which we read in the Torah two weeks ago) opens with the events

of the third day after the circumcision of Abraham, our forefather.

On that day, the elderly Abraham was ill and exhausted, and G-d, who had compassion on him, decided that he was exempt from performing acts of kindness at that time. Therefore, He removed the coverings from the sun, allowing it to show its strength.

The heat was dreadful; no one dared venture outside.

However, Abraham's heart, which was a chariot for the attribute of *Chesed* of *Atzilut*, could not reconcile itself to the fact that a day would pass for him without kindness! So he sent his servant Eliezer to search for some guests. But Eliezer returned crestfallen and empty-handed. "No! I did not find a single guest!"

Abraham looked at Eliezer in disappointment and thought to himself: "There's no trusting servants! He's probably afraid that if he finds guests, he'll have to work!"

He rose with the last of his strength and sat at the entrance of the tent. *Maybe? Perhaps after all?*

Abraham was still sitting at the tent entrance when G-d came to visit him. And although Abraham merited a visit, as it were, from the Divine Presence itself, he suddenly noticed three Arabs staggering along the road, and immediately he "left" the holy Presence and ran toward them.

After they ate and drank, the visitors revealed themselves to Abraham and Sarah and announced to them that soon, a son would be born to them.³

And indeed, when Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90, a son was born to them! Abraham and Sarah, who were especially generous of heart, decided to make a "great feast" on the day that Isaac was weaned.

 Wellsprings of Wisdom

3. As an aside, we must recognize that the greatest blessing in the world is when one merits to bring another Jewish

soul into the world! Every person must yearn and long for this privilege—to have a large Jewish family!

Parshat Toldot - The Emergence of Isaac

Their son represented the essence of their spiritual service and was accordingly named Isaac (יצחק), hinting at their elderly age at which he was born, the ten difficult trials that Abraham had passed, and the eighth day when he was circumcised (י" - עשרה נסיונות. צ' - תשעים שנות) העבודה של שרה. ח' - שמונת ימי המילה. ק' - (מאה שנות העבודה של אברהם)

Abraham and Sarah did not rely on the promise of the angels that their son would be "a pure saint"; they invested their all into raising him and providing him with a proper and pure education.

When Isaac was 37 years old, G-d revealed Himself to Abraham and commanded him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering on one of the mountains.

...*Wellsprings of Wisdom*...

The Vizhnitz journal Az Nidberu (no. 80, p. 45) records the following tale:

"In the town of Ravna, a day's journey from Talne, lived a simple Jew, Reb Yisrael David. He and his wife were raising twelve children, yet their livelihood kept shrinking. By 5639 (1879), an unforgiving winter had frozen the wells he relied on for his meager trade—hauling water to homes. Bread and water were scarce, and his children were starving.

Desperate, Reb Yisrael David trudged through the snow to the holy Rabbi Dovid of Talne. Bursting into tears, he cried, 'My wife and I can fast—but what of our twelve little ones?' The Rebbe listened, then blessed him: 'May your wife soon bear a son.'

On his way home, Reb Yisrael David groaned, 'Another mouth to feed?' Yet that summer, his wife indeed gave birth—to their thirteenth child.

Soon afterward, the infant grew ill. At the doctor's clinic, a Polish nobleman and his wife arrived with their own sick child. Waiting together, the noblewoman noticed the Jewish baby's blue eyes and was captivated. She asked about the family's hardships and pledged to visit them.

The couple soon appeared at Reb Yisrael David's door, shocked by the poverty they saw. The nobleman offered him a position as his personal secretary, granted him a fine house, and also provided them with a steady income.

Months later, Reb Yisrael David returned to Rabbi David of Talne to relate the miracle. The Rebbe explained: 'I saw a harsh decree of hunger upon you, and finding no other solution, I prayed for you to be blessed with another child—who would usher in a blessing of wealth and prosperity. Through this child, your entire family was saved.'

Parshat Toldot - Breaking Through the Darkness

During the Binding (*Akeidah*), Sarah's soul left her; and it is at

this point that *Parashat Chayei Sarah* begins.

Breaking Through the Darkness

The Torah portion of Chayei Sarah is so-called because it summarizes Sarah's life. Yet when we look closely, we see that only a very small handful of verses speak about Sarah herself and her burial, whereas the great majority deals with Isaac's match.

From the many verses, we discern how many difficulties Eliezer had to confront — how much spiritual darkness and dreadful impurity he had to battle.

Nevertheless, in the end, he succeeded in tearing through all the veils of darkness, selecting Rebecca from among them, and bringing her to his master, Isaac.

Isaac and Rebecca married, and the Torah states: "And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah, his mother; he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother" (Genesis 24:67).

Here, the portion of Chayei Sarah concludes, and *Parashat Toldot* begins and says: "And

Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife" (Genesis 25:20).

We read this and ask: after all, in the previous parasha, the Torah devoted more than sixty verses to Isaac's *shidduch* (match), and there we already learned all the details. For what purpose does the Torah repeat these details here?

Even more puzzling is that in the previous parasha, they were already married and living together. So why does the Torah repeat the details of the match?

We find that Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, zt"l (the *Ha'amek Davar* on Genesis 25:20), wrote the following:

"When examining this verse, we see that it says 'bekachto et Rivka' ('in his taking Rebecca'), and we must understand why it did not say more simply 'vayikach et Rivka' ('and he took Rebecca').

Parshat Toldot - Twenty Years of Barrenness

Rather, the truth is that Isaac wanted to marry at a younger age, but he did not find [a suitable match]! Only when he was forty did he find one.⁴ Therefore, it says: 'when he took Rebecca.'

And the verse goes on to say: 'the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.' This teaches that despite her being from the city of Paddan-Aram, whose people were wicked and cruel, and

despite her being the sister of that harsh klipah (husk of evil) — Laban the Aramean,⁵ nevertheless, [Isaac] did not refrain from marrying her because he knew she was his destined match! And Rebecca knew this too...

Thus, this verse comes to reveal to us that both of them knew and understood that they were a true match, that they belonged to one another..."

Twenty Years of Barrenness

The Torah continues and writes that nearly twenty years passed from the day of their wedding, and they still had no children!

When Isaac and Rebecca saw that this was the situation, they decided to go out to battle, as Rashi (on Genesis 25:21) describes: "This one stood in this corner and prayed, and

that one stood in that corner and prayed!"

We must understand:

a. How does Rashi know that they stood in a corner and prayed? Perhaps they stood in the middle of the room?

b. How does Rashi know that they prayed? Perhaps they cried out or shouted?⁶

Wellsprings of Wisdom

4. This is also why our forefather Jacob did not marry until the age of 84, because, following the path of Abraham and Isaac, no suitable woman was found for him before then.

5. And the holy Gemara says (Bava Batra 110a): "Most children resemble the mother's brother."

6. For prayer is referred to by ten terms, as brought in the Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 2:1):

Parshat Toldot - Twenty Years of Barrenness

Rabbi Yaakov Tamiriless, zt"l, explained as follows:⁷

“Know that at the time G-d created His world, He created it initially with the Name *Yah* (י-ה) [which equals 15 in gematria], as it is said: ‘For with *Yah* G-d fashioned the worlds’ (Isaiah 26:4). After that, He perfected the world and the world became *tak* (תק) [which equals 500 in gematria].⁸

Likewise, man is a small world; when he prays with intent, he builds a world. And when he wishes to create a world, he needs these two aspects: 15 and 500.

And the combination of these two aspects — 15 and 500

together — has the gematria value of *tefillah* (prayer)!

Now Isaac and Rebecca, who were barren, could not build a world (i.e., a new life). So they joined together the numbers of their names to pray:

The beginning of the name *Yitzchak* is the letter *yud* (10), and the end of the name *Rivka* is the letter *heh* (5) — together forming the Name *Yah*. And this is what Rashi meant in his holy words: ‘this corner and that corner’ — that each of them held onto the end of his (or her) own name.

And the remaining letters, *tzchak* (צחק) [from *Yitzchak*] and

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

Rabbi Yochanan said, there are ten terms for prayer, and they are: shav'ah, tze'akah, na'akah, rinah, pegiah, bitzur, keriah, nipul, pilul, and tachanunim.

7. These words are cited in *Derush Shmuel* (Parashat Vayetze — “Vayetar Yitzchak”) by Rabbi Shmuel Feivish Kahana Sofer, zt"l.

8. To quote Rabbeinu Bachya's words (Exodus 25:7):

“You should know that the sum of the things in this parasha (Terumah) that the

Torah mentions as a contribution is 15... And these are the 15 items brought as a contribution for the Mishkan: gold, silver, copper, blue [wool], purple [wool], scarlet [wool], fine linen, goats' hair, rams' skins dyed red, tachash skins, acacia wood, oil, spices, onyx stones, and filling stones...

The Mishkan corresponds to the creation of the world, and it is written: “For with *Yah* (י-ה) G-d fashioned the worlds” (Isaiah 26:4).

Parshat Toldot - If So, Why Then Am I?!

Rivk (רִבְקָה) [from Rivka], have the gematria of 500 (תק) ! And together with joining the ends (the yud and heh), it is exactly 515, which is the numerical value of *tefillah*.

Therefore, Rashi wrote that they prayed..."

And G-d heard their prayer: *"And G-d allowed Himself to be entreated by him, and Rebecca his wife conceived"* (Genesis 25:21)...

If So, Why Then Am I?!

The Torah continues and writes: *"And the children struggled together within her, and she said: If so, why then am I?!"* (Genesis 25:22). Rebecca's pregnancy was difficult. Apparently, inside her womb was a baby lacking stability, lacking a backbone. Therefore, when she would pass by a house of idol worship, he would start to agitate — *I want to come out!* And similarly, when she would pass by a house of study, he would agitate — *I want to come out!*

Besides that, he was apparently hyperactive, and he was constantly jumping and tussling, hitting and scratching, kicking and biting...

She could not understand why she was suffering from him so much, so she asked: "Why then am I?!" Yet, at first glance, this

question is not understood — if the baby was the problem, she should have asked, "What is going on with the baby?" and not asked about herself, "Why then am I?"

We find that Rabbi Yehuda Asad, zt"l, in his sefer *Divrei Mahari'a* (Part I, p. 44), writes as follows:

"One great Torah scholar (Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, zt"l) wrote to me an explanation of the verse: *'And the children struggled within her, and she said: If so, why then am I?!'...*

Abraham commanded Eliezer to go to Paddan-Aram to take from there a wife for his son. This was because Abraham knew with his holy spirit that from all the daughters of the land, Isaac would not be able to

Parshat Toldot - If So, Why Then Am I?!

beget from them offspring that was pure and righteous; only from his own family (who were in Paddan-Aram) did he know that he could beget righteous offspring.

Rebecca also knew this.

Therefore, when she saw the children struggling — and when she went by a house of idol worship, Esau squirmed to come out — Rebecca saw that from her, a wicked offspring was emerging. It was difficult for her to understand: If so, why did Isaac marry *me* (Rebecca) if a wicked child is coming from me as well? He could just as well have married a woman from the daughters of Canaan, and it would be the same.

And that is what she said: 'If so, why then am I?' — why did Abraham choose me in particular? If a wicked son will come out of me, then how am I better than the daughters of Canaan?!

And Rebecca's heart shattered into thousands of pieces. 'Apparently, I am not worthy! Not sufficiently holy and pure!'

'And surely,' her thoughts continued to rage, 'if I go to tell my father-in-law Abraham or my husband Isaac, they will look at me in astonishment: "What? You're pregnant with a wicked son? Then that's a sign that your inside is not as pure as your outside!" And maybe — maybe Abraham will tell Isaac to divorce me'...

'No! I can't bear that!'

'But,' another thought popped up, 'a Jew must be connected to Torah scholars! A Jew cannot live his life disconnected from Torah scholars!'⁹ And so she decided to go to the righteous man who was still alive in her days — Shem, the son of Noah!

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

9. The Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Shwei, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Philadelphia, wrote as follows (*Otzrot shel Chinuch* — *Ma'aseh Chiy*"a vol. 2, p. 299):

"Faith in the Sages is the foundation of Judaism.

On the verse: "Only take heed... lest you forget the things your eyes saw, etc." (Deuteronomy 4:9), the Ramban explains that it refers to the event of the Giving of the Torah at Sinai.

As it says later in the verse: "And she went to inquire of G-d" (Genesis 25:22), and the Midrash says (Bereishit Rabbah 63:6): *'And she went to inquire of G-d?! But did she not only go to the academy of Shem and Eber? Rather, this teaches you that whoever greets an elder is as if he greets the Divine Presence!'*

The Etz Yosef commentary explains: 'For the Divine Presence, may He be blessed, rests upon the tzaddik. And by drawing close to the tzaddik, the spirit of holiness also adheres to him somewhat — similar to: "I will increase some of the spirit [that is upon you]" (Numbers 11:17).'

Shem answered her: *"And he said: Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will separate from your insides"* (Genesis 25:23)...

"Know, Rebecca, that there are two nations in your womb, Jacob and Esau. And from these two, in a future generation, two righteous men will emerge: Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi — from Jacob and Antoninus — from Esau.

Meaning that even though Esau was wicked, nevertheless, a righteous man was destined to come from him. But if Isaac had married a woman from the daughters of Canaan, there

 Wellsprings of Wisdom

The Torah warns us against forgetting that event as a guarantee for observing its commandments. And if you ask: What guarantee is there for later generations that did not stand at Sinai and did not witness the thunder and lightning?

The Ramban answers that the guarantee is based on the trust every Jewish child has in his parents and on the faith every student has in his teacher. And on this solid basis, indeed, the entire Jewish tradition was built. Thus, the chain of generations of our nation continued for thousands of years until our time.

I recall how Rabbi Aharon Kotler, zt"l, spoke about his personal tradition (mesorah). He would recount with emotion that he himself received from the Chafetz Chaim, and the Chafetz Chaim received from disciples of the Vilna Gaon...

And we felt how, in his emotion, Rabbi Aharon affirmed his mesorah. With our own eyes, we saw how, for him, "the rejoicing as when they were given from Sinai." We saw in him all the great fire, the enthusiasm, the fervor of the Sinai Revelation..."

Parshat Toldot - If So, Why Then Am I?!

would have been born generations that would be entirely wicked — forever!"

[As an aside: The words of the Midrash make clear that whoever greets an elder is like greeting the Divine Presence.¹⁰ For there is power in merely seeing the tzaddik to purify the soul! And with this, we can understand the

story of Rabbi Nissim Yagen (that we brought at the beginning of the talk), that simply by coming near the Rav, the wayward father already repented!]

The answer that Shem, son of Noah, gave Rebecca revived her spirit, and she waited for the birth. After some time, she gave birth to twins: Jacob and Esau.

— *Wellsprings of Wisdom* —

10. To the extent that one can even merit the title *Morenu HaRav*! By way of illustration:

A well-known Rosh Yeshivah was once asked how it could be that Yaakov Rosenheim z"l, the president of Agudath Israel, was given the title *Morenu HaRav* (Our Teacher, the Rabbi) — even though he was not a rabbi, nor even a Torah scholar? Moreover, that the Chafetz Chaim and Rabbi Chaim Ozer — the two great luminaries upon whom all of Israel relied — also called him *Morenu*?

The Rosh Yeshivah answered: "*Rabbi Rosenheim was an educated, clever, insightful man who knew a great deal — and even so, he completely nullified his own opinion in favor of the Gedolei Yisrael. He never looked for excuses to do things according to his understanding; rather, whatever the Gedolei Yisrael said — that was the*

final word for him! He never failed and never fell short in fulfilling even one detail of the will of the Torah leaders. Therefore, he deserved to be called 'Morenu HaRav'..." (*Lehis'aneig BeTa'anugim*, p. 96, by Rabbi Y. Greenboim).

And one of the Torah greats similarly explained our Sages' saying (Bava Kama 92b): "Whoever attaches himself to the pure is purified." At first glance, these words defy understanding. After all, how many efforts did the *pure* person toil, how many inner struggles and difficulties did he endure until he attained purity — and then someone else comes near and draws close to him, and already becomes pure?!

Rather, to merit attaching oneself to the pure, and to nullify one's own mind to that of the pure — that is no less difficult than the work that the pure person put in himself...

Parshat Toldot - Step After Step

As for Esau, there is really nothing to talk about — he was a man of cold blood, lacking heart and lacking feeling... From

him emerged the nation of *Edom*.

We instead will focus on Jacob.

Step After Step

After the tremendous purification that Abraham and Sarah went through, and after the enormous effort and brokenhearted prayers of Isaac and Rebecca — the “dregs” of the severities of impurity that still remained in Isaac emerged in Esau, and all the goodness and holiness emerged in Jacob.

The soul of our forefather Jacob was an immensely great and awesome soul, and therefore, from the very moment it entered a body, it was clear that it would face terrible trials.

Our forefather Jacob devoted his entire life to serving his Creator with all his might, focusing all his energies on the founding of the people of Israel.

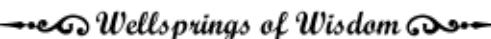
But we are getting ahead of ourselves; let us start from the beginning:

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Yekutiel Tzvi Halberstam, zt”l,¹¹ he elaborated on the course of our forefather Jacob's life.

As mentioned, Rebecca conceived twins — two sons who were destined to be great rivals throughout history.

And as is known, their rivalry began already in their mother's womb! Already in the womb, Esau caused Jacob distress, and Jacob's humiliations continued even after their birth.

Thus the birth of Esau is described: “*And the first one emerged ruddy, entirely like a hairy mantle*” (Genesis 25:25).



11. *Shefa Chaim* — *Ra'ava Deravivin* (Parashat Toldot, Ma'amar 12, sec. 2).

Parshat Toldot - Truth to Jacob

Then Jacob came out: “*And afterward his brother came out, and his hand was grasping*

Esau's heel, and he called his name Jacob” (Genesis 25:26).

Truth to Jacob

Jacob and Esau were twins who were not alike at all — not in external appearance (since Esau was hairy and ruddy, and Jacob was smooth-skinned and fair), and not in inner character.

Nevertheless, until the age of thirteen, they walked the same paths and sat together on the same bench in school.

Then, at the age of thirteen, Esau had a breakdown. Thus, it is stated: “*And the boys grew up, and Esau became a man who knew hunting, a man of the field; but Jacob was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents*” (Genesis 25:27).

Rashi explains: “*And the boys grew up, and Esau...*” — As long as they were young, their deeds were not discernible, and no one scrutinized them to determine their character. Once they became 13 years old, this one (Jacob) went off to the study halls,¹² and that one (Esau) went off to idol worship.’

It was the attribute of truth burning within Jacob that helped him to overcome all of life's trials, as it is said: “*You will give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham*” (Micah 7:20).

Two years passed from that day, and their illustrious grandfather,

— **Wellsprings of Wisdom** —

12. A student of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt”l, related:

One day, a Jew entered the yeshiva where Rabbi Moshe was teaching and said that a few minutes earlier, a Jewish boy had been struck by a car right near

the yeshiva and was severely injured; it would be appropriate to say a few chapters of Tehillim for his recovery.

Rabbi Moshe declared that the boy was not Jewish and that they would not interrupt their learning for this.

Abraham, our forefather, passed away!

Jacob, fifteen years old, was deeply grieved by the passing of his grandfather — his great teacher — and he went to cook a lentil stew to serve as the mourner's meal of comfort for his father, Isaac.

Meanwhile, far off, Esau was roaming the fields, looking for prey... And our Sages revealed that on the day of Abraham's

passing, Esau committed five serious transgressions.¹³

When Esau saw the stew that Jacob had cooked, his mouth filled with saliva. "My dear brother, please... let me gulp down some of that red, red stuff, for I am exhausted..."

The evil inclination snuck in and whispered to Jacob:¹⁴ "Now you can get back at Esau for what he did to you... Don't let him off so easily — extract

 Wellsprings of Wisdom

The man said: "I myself saw that he had a kippah on his head!"

But Rabbi Moshe stood firm: the boy was certainly not Jewish.

The man went out to investigate and returned astonished: indeed, it turned out to have been a gentile boy who had snatched a yarmulke from a Jewish boy, run into the street, and been hit by a car.

The man asked Rabbi Moshe: How did the Rav know the boy wasn't Jewish — did a spirit of prophecy suddenly come over you?

Rabbi Moshe replied: I am not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet. But at that time, I was in the yeshiva immersed in a difficult

sugya, and it cannot be that at such a moment, a tragedy would befall a Jewish child right outside the yeshiva... (*Lehis'aneig BeTa'anugim*, p. 323, by Rabbi Y. Greenboim).

13. To quote the words of Yonatan ben Uziel (Genesis 25:29):

"And on that day when Abraham died, Jacob cooked a stew of lentils and went to comfort Isaac, his father; and Esau came from the field, and he was exhausted, for he had committed five severe sins on that day: he worshipped idolatry, shed innocent blood, engaged with a betrothed maiden, denied the life of the World to Come, and spurned his birthright!"

14. Rabbi Chanoch Henoch of Alexander, zt"l (*Chashavah LeTovah*, Parashat Vayetze).

Parshat Toldot - Isaac's blessings to Jacob

a price from him... Tell him that you won't agree to give him food until he gives you his birthright in exchange!"

Jacob turns to Esau and says to him, "You want to eat? *Sell me, as of today, your birthright*" (Genesis 25:31).

The deal was sealed. Jacob hurried and brought a funnel; Esau opened his mouth, and Jacob poured the entire pot of stew through the funnel into his mouth!

Jacob and Esau continued to grow older...

Isaac's blessings to Jacob

Jacob and Esau were 63 years old. Isaac, their father, was nearing his 123rd year, and he therefore said to Esau: "So now, my son, I have grown old, and I do not know the day of my death.

Therefore, I ask you: go out to the field and hunt me some game, "*and prepare tasty foods such as I love...*" (Genesis 27:3–4).

At that moment, Rebecca was sitting in her house, "*and Rebecca was listening as Isaac spoke to Esau, his son*" (Genesis 27:5).

Jacob disguised himself as Esau, entered his father's presence, received the blessings, and left.

Esau, realizing that Jacob had once again gotten the better of him, boiled with rage, and his anger kept growing until he

decided, once and for all, to kill Jacob, his brother...

The holy Torah continues and says: "*And it was told to Rebecca the words of Esau, her older son...*" (Genesis 27:42) — Rashi explains: "*And it was told to Rebecca*" — it was told to her through the Holy Spirit what Esau was thinking in his heart."

Rebecca called Jacob and commanded him to flee to the house of her brother — to Laban.

However, since everything has to be done with the husband's consent, Rebecca approached Isaac and said to him: "*I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth — such*

daughters of the land as these — what is life to me ?”

Isaac, our forefather, the holy one who was bound upon the altar, the epitome of holiness and purity, perfect in piety, called over his son Jacob and commanded him to seek a wife in Haran; under no circumstances would he take a wife from the daughters of Canaan: *"And Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan'"* (Genesis 28:1).

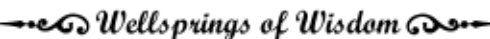
“Know,” Isaac revealed to Jacob, “Grandfather Abraham and I served our Creator sincerely and wholeheartedly, and we both succeeded in our missions. But you have an additional mission: to establish the nation of Israel...”

The holy Torah continues and writes a most remarkable verse: *"And Jacob obeyed his father and his mother and went to Paddan-Aram"* (Genesis 28:7)...

After such an arduous path of spiritual ascent, after such self-sacrifice and acceptance of burdens, did the Torah not have more praise to lavish upon Jacob, no more than the fact that *"Jacob obeyed his father and his mother and went to Paddan-Aram"* ?

But in truth, after reading the story we presented at the beginning of this booklet (regarding Rabbi Aharon Kotler), we can begin to understand.

Jacob, our Patriarch, recognized that he had to leave his entire sheltered environment, a setting suffused with holiness and light, and journey to a place where mockery, impurity, and moral abandon prevailed! Jacob also knew that a person is inevitably drawn after his surroundings, and therefore, by obeying the voice of his father and mother, he ran the risk of forfeiting his very life!¹⁵ Yet, we see that even so, Jacob listened! And that is indeed a great praise!



15. Thus wrote the *Shem MiShmuel* (Parashat Lech-Lecha, 5676 [1916]).

Parshat Toldot - The Counsel of the Sages

Yet, he did not obey immediately. Before he went to Haran, he hid himself away for

a time — specifically, he spent fourteen years in the house of study of Shem and Eber.

The Counsel of the Sages

Now, if you think the praise of Jacob concludes here, look at the words of the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 67:12) on the verse “The wise person listens to counsel” (Proverbs 12:15): *This refers to Jacob, who obeyed the voice of his father and his mother!*

Rabbi Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, of blessed memory, asked:¹⁶

Our Sages called Jacob “wise” solely because he listened to his parents. What wisdom, exactly, did they see in that obedience?

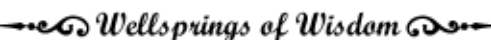
More than that, Esau was “*comforting himself with the thought of killing him*” — a fact attested to by his mother, Rebecca. In Haran, the woman destined to build the House of Israel and the tribes of Jeshurun

was waiting for Jacob; his match awaited him there.

Was this seemingly elementary act of self-preservation what the Sages described as Jacob's wisdom?

The matter rather is this: Jacob set out on his way, not because of his own understanding but because he obeyed his father and mother. True, human reason pointed in the same way, but he did not flee because logic dictated it. He fled because his parents commanded him. That was the strength of his wisdom: every private calculation he thrust aside, he acted solely out of obedience: “*Jacob obeyed his father and his mother*” (Genesis 28:7).

Such wisdom is heroic indeed — to master one's own



16. *Birkat Mordechai* (Genesis — p. 331).

judgment, dismiss the simple, obvious considerations, and act *solely* because “the wise person listens to counsel.”

Put differently, plain logic might have suggested a different course. Why should Jacob flee from Esau? Could he not overpower him? His strength was great: he later rolled the stone off the well and even wrestled with an angel and prevailed. What could prevent him from confronting Esau openly and using that strength to subdue him? Why not settle accounts once and for all and then proceed to Haran with a calm, untroubled mind?

Rather, Jacob knew there was no other way. The single decisive factor before him was precisely that of *listening to counsel*. Jacob would never turn aside from the path of wisdom, and that path is but one: “The wise person listens to counsel.” Any other line of reasoning, however straight it may appear, is merely the

reasoning of a fool — “For the fool, every way seems right in his own eyes” (Proverbs 12:15). For the wise, the very first consideration is obedience to sound counsel.

On a deeper layer:

It is hard for a person to listen to someone else. He feels as though he is surrendering his very *self*, erasing his identity.

Indeed, true listening is hard — very hard. But the wise know that their own advice and counsel looks straight and sound in their eyes, and that very “straightness” blinds them, hiding the distortions that may be within. What looks straight is merely relative, matching their distorted inner vision.

Genuine listening involves sacrifice. Yet that is what is demanded of us. Whoever attains it elevates himself to the truth of his essential being, to a pure, refined self.

We now turn to conclude our talk...

On “Right” That It Is “Left”

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky of blessed memory, he said the following:¹⁷

A man once came to me, thoroughly agitated: “What are we to make of the verse, *‘Do not stray from the word they tell you, right or left’* (Deuteronomy 17:11), which our sages explain to mean: “*even if they tell you that your right is left and your left is right*”?

“How can that be? I know perfectly well which is right and which is left, and a thousand sages cannot change that! Is the Torah commanding me to lie to myself and behave contrary to the truth?”

I calmed him: “Set your mind at ease. The Torah is truth, and Heaven forbid it should ever demand a departure from the truth.”

So what, then, is written here? —

Let me explain: notice that it does not say they might tell you that west is east or that day is night, for east is always east, and west is always west; day is day, and night is night.

But imagine the Rabbi tells you to turn right and points north while you — standing opposite him — turn to your right, southward.

The Rabbi says, “That is not what I meant; you must turn north, as I instructed.”

You insist, “Rabbi, you said to turn right, and south is to my right.”

The Rabbi replies, “South is to your right only because you are facing me from the opposite direction — stand as I am standing, and north will be to your right!”

Of course, this is an allegory — the message is clear.

Parshat Toldot - On “Right” That It Is “Left”

Why do people fail to understand the sages, act against their guidance, voice opposite opinions, and criticize them? —

It all stems from standing against them instead of standing with them and facing the same direction.

How far can this error go?

Let me tell you:

Once, the Chelkat Yo'av wrote a novel insight on the laws of Shabbat and sent it to his teacher, the Avnei Nezer, who read it and later wrote a reply, rejecting the premise of the insight.

When the disciple came to visit, the Avnei Nezer asked, "Well, what do you say?"

For the wise, a hint is enough — the disciple answered, “I accept the Rabbi's view.”

He was asked, “And what do you think in your heart?”

He replied, "In my heart, I still believe I am right."

The Avnei Nezer rose, shaken and stirred, and cried out, “Is *that* what our sages demand, that '*the awe of your teacher be like the awe of Heaven*'?!”

If the Rabbi says the opposite, you are obliged to align yourself with him — and not to think he is mistaken while you merely keep quiet...

Shabbat Shalom!



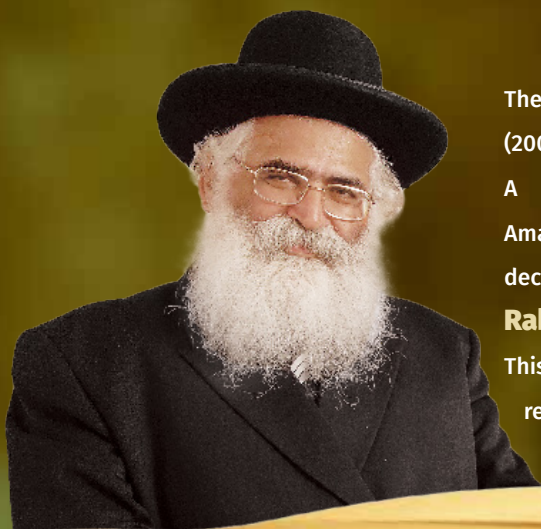
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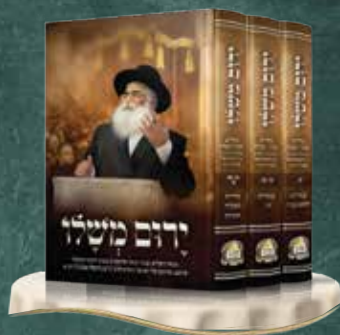


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T"03

Shabbat Times Toldot

2nd of Kislev, 5786



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:15 pm	5:17 pm	5:45 pm
Miami	5:12 pm	6:06 pm	6:42 pm
Los Angeles	4:29 pm	5:26 pm	5:58 pm
Montreal	4:00 pm	5:06 pm	5:29 pm
Toronto	4:29 pm	5:33 pm	5:58 pm
London	3:45 pm	4:58 pm	5:14 pm
Jerusalem	4:22 pm	5:12 pm	5:45 pm
Tel Aviv	4:18 pm	5:08 pm	5:41 pm
Haifa	4:15 pm	5:09 pm	5:41 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:19 pm	5:13 pm	5:45 pm

Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l

One must always look to the right and to the left to see whether the members of the household are with him.

When your boys are already six or seven—do they come to the prayers? "No, they can't come to the synagogue; they distract me, I cannot concentrate in prayer; if I have to watch them, I cannot pray at all"—this is not acceptable. One must be attentive to those around him: where are his children, is everything all right with them?

One must check what the environment needs; do not worry only about yourself, pay attention to what is happening around you—what your friend needs, what your neighbor needs, what your spouse needs.



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