

We read in our *Parashah* (26:1), "There was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that was in the days of Avraham." Why, asks R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel), does the Torah mention that the famine in the days of Yitzchak was "aside from the first famine that was in the days of Avraham"?

He explains: One of the foundations that the Book of *Bereishit* is meant to teach us is that *Hashem* sustained the Patriarchs and shaped their future in a wondrous, supernatural way. The formation of the Jewish People was not a natural outgrowth of Creation. Rather, it was an entirely separate process directed by *Hashem*, as we read (*Yeshayah* 43:21), "I fashioned this people for Myself." And just as *Hashem* created the Jewish People through the wonders of the Exodus, so His *Hashgachah Peratit* / Divine Providence directed the formation and development of the nation's roots--the Patriarchs--through the miracles and supernatural events described in this week's *Parashah* and the surrounding *Parashot*.

R' Mintzberg continues: As soon as Avraham reached the land that had been promised to him and his descendants, there was a famine (see *Bereishit* 12:10). This was meant to teach him and us that, if left to the forces of nature, we cannot exist in *Eretz Yisrael*. Only through G-d's miracles and wonders can we remain in the Land.

Yitzchak, too, needed to be taught that lesson. Therefore, he experienced a famine just like, says the Torah, the famine in the days of Avraham. (*Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah*)

Shabbat

R' Eliyahu E. Dessler *shlita* (*Mashiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the *Michtav M'Eliyahu*) writes: Our Sages speak in glowing terms of the reward awaiting one who fulfills the *Mitzvah* of eating three meals on *Shabbat*. They say, for example (*Shabbat* 118a), that such a person will be saved from the birth pangs of *Mashiach*, from judgment in *Gehinom*, and from the war of Gog and Magog. The sage Rabbi Yosé declares (*Shabbat* 118b), "Let my portion be among those who eat three meals on *Shabbat*!" Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules (*O.C.* 291:1), "One should be very careful to have a third meal."

The simple understanding, continues R' Dessler, is that normal practice in the time of the *Gemara* and the *Shulchan Aruch* was to eat only two meals a day. Therefore, when one eats a third meal on *Shabbat*, he demonstrates that the day is special. Some commentaries do, in fact, understand the *Mitzvah* in this way, writes R' Dessler.

However, he continues, R' David Abudarham z"l (Spain; late 13th-early 14th centuries; one of the most influential commentators and *Halachic* authorities in matters relating to the *Siddur*) explains the *Mitzvah* in a different and very surprising way. R' Abudarham writes: When one overeats, he will naturally delay his next meal. In contrast, when he knows that he is obligated to eat another meal today, he will eat in moderation. Thus, by requiring us to eat an extra meal on *Shabbat*, the Torah ensures that we will eat only to the degree that it is a *Mitzvah* to do so, and that we will not overeat and fall asleep from "heaviness." In this way, we will accomplish several things: We will remain free to study Torah, and, by clearing the table before we are full, we will practice conquering our *Yetzer Ha'ra*. This will train us to eat properly all week long, as well.

(*Sha'arei Ha'zmanim: Shabbat* p.39)

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“Yitzchak sowed in that land, and in that year he reaped a hundredfold, and Hashem blessed him.” (26:12)

Rashi z”l writes: Our Sages say that the estimate was made for the purpose of separating *Ma’aser* / a tithe.

Why do our Sages assume that Yitzchak estimated the size of his crop for the purpose of separating *Ma’aser*? R’ Shabtai Bass z”l (1641-1718) explains: The *Gemara* (*Ta’anit* 8a) teaches that blessing does not rest on that which is weighed or measured, only on that which is hidden. Therefore, Yitzchak would not have measured, or even estimated, the size of his crop unless he had a very particular reason for doing so--*i.e.*, to separate *Ma’aser*.
(*Siftei Chachamim*)

The *Gemara* referred to above teaches: Before one enters the area where he will measure the pile of grain from his harvest, he should recite, “May it be Your will that You will send (שְׁתַּלַּח) a blessing to the handiwork of our hands.” When he begins to measure his harvest, he should recite, “Blessed is the One who sends (הַשּׁוֹלַח) blessing into this pile.’ If one recites this formula after measuring the pile, it is a prayer in vain, for blessing does not rest on that which is weighed or measured, only on that which is hidden. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Moshe Teitelbaum z”l (1759–1841; rabbi and *Chassidic Rebbe* in Újhely, Hungary) asks: Why does the *Gemara* use the verb “send” (from the root “שִׁלַּח”) rather than asking *Hashem* to “give” His blessing?

He explains: The world exists only because *Hashem* continually sends His blessing to it. How is that blessing delivered to us? Ordinarily, through what we perceive as nature, which, in fact, is nothing more than *Hashem’s* messenger (“שְׁלִיחַ,” from the same root mentioned above). This explains the *Gemara’s* verb choice, and it also explains why blessing does not rest on that which is weighed or measured, only on that which is hidden. Since *Hashem’s* usual messenger to bring us blessing is nature, blessing cannot come in a way that blatantly contravenes nature. (Once the size of the crop is known, it cannot suddenly multiply.)

On the other hand, if one has not measured his crop and no one knows it weight, volume, or value, *Hashem* can bless it without blatantly contravening the laws of nature. This, writes R’ Teitelbaum, is why King Shlomo says (*Kohelet* 1:18), “With much wisdom comes much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases pain.” This also explains why we say in *Shemoneh Esrei*, “*V’ten berachah*” / “Give a blessing”--*i.e.*, we ask *Hashem* to bless us Himself, rather than using a messenger. And, lastly, it explains why our verse says that after Yitzchak measured his crop, which he needed to do in order to tithe it, “*Hashem* blessed him”--*Hashem*, not His agent.

(*Yismach Moshe*)

“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham--Avraham fathered Yitzchak.” (25:19)

Rashi z”l writes that the Torah emphasizes that “Avraham fathered Yitzchak” because the scoffers of the generation claimed that Avimelech, king of the Plishtim, must have fathered Yitzchak. [Until here from *Rashi*]

It is remarkable, comments R’ Shlomo Wolbe z”l (1914-2005; a pre-eminent figure in the *Mussar* movement), that there were people who could scoff at and mock Avraham. However, it must be so, for the greater the holiness that exists in a particular generation, the greater must the force of impurity be, as well. Otherwise, our ability to exercise *Bechirah* / free will would be compromised.

(*Shiurei Chumash*)

R’ Dovid Feinstein z”l (1929-2020; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York) writes: Our verse begins with the conjunction “*Vav*” / “And,” because its theme continues from the parallel verse above (25:12), “And these are the descendants of Yishmael son of Avraham...” In turn, that verse begins with a “*Vav*” because it follows the verses that precede it, which list Avraham’s offspring.

R’ Feinstein continues: It is important to know that Avraham loved his sons Yitzchak and Yishmael equally. The proof of this is that *Hashem* had to spell out before the *Akeidah* (22:2), “Please take your son, your only one, whom you love--Yitzchak.” As *Rashi z”l* notes, it was insufficient for *Hashem* to say, “Your son whom you love,” because Avraham responded, “I love both of them.” Likewise, the verses referred to above refer to “Yitzchak son of Avraham” and “Yishmael son of Avraham” in precisely parallel language.

Nevertheless, writes R’ Feinstein, our verse does contain an additional expression that is not found regarding Yishmael. It says, “Avraham fathered Yitzchak.” Perhaps, once Yitzchak became distinguished, Avraham became known by the honorary title “Yitzchak’s father,” just as some of the sages in the *Talmud* are known as “So-and-so’s father” (for example, “*Avuha D’Shmuel*” / “The father of Shmuel”), rather than by their own names. But Avraham never wore proudly the title “Yishmael’s father.”

The lesson from all of this, concludes R’ Feinstein, is that there may be a basis to distinguish between one’s children in some respects. But when it comes to the love that one shows them, they must be treated equally. (*Le’Dovid Mizmor*)

“Yaakov said, ‘Sell, as this day, your birthright to me.’” (25:31)

What is meant by “as this day”? R’ Pinchas Zalman Horowitz z”l (1832-1906; Krakow, Galicia) explains:

Our Sages say that the sale of the birthright took place on the same day that Avraham passed away. Yaakov wanted Esav to understand the value of what he was selling so that he could not back out later, writes R’ Horowitz. Therefore, Yaakov said: “Know, ‘as this day,’ when our grandfather died and our father inherited his riches, that you, too, will someday inherit a double share of our father’s wealth, for that is the birthright of the firstborn.” Being fully informed, Esav then replied (verse 31), “Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?”
(*Ahavat Torah*)