



Bet Horaah בית הוראה Shaarei Ezra שערי עזרא

Parshat Toldot

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 4:18pm

Shabbat ends: 5:20pm

R"T 5:48pm

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CONFRONTING DANGER HEAD-ON: LESSONS FROM THE PARASHA NARRATIVES

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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In our parasha (Toldot), Yitzchak Avinu digs three wells. The first two times, the wells are clogged by the locals, whereas the third time, he is left to keep it.

The first time, they claim that the water belongs to them and he has no right to it.

The second time, they clog it without providing any reason. However, on the third occasion, they allow Yitzchak to keep his wells. At first glance, the different

approaches on each of the three times is seemingly perplexing—what was the point of it? The Natziv offers a fascinating interpretation. The Torah explicitly states that the people clogged the well due to jealousy towards Yitzchak, a sentiment often observed in anti-semitism. However, the first time, they needed an excuse for their actions; they couldn't harm Yitzchak without a seemingly reasonable cause, even though it was merely an excuse. The next time they struck however, as anti-semites tend to do, they no longer required a pretext and could boldly assert their baseless claims. The Natziv suggests that since Yitzchak didn't personally dig the well the first two times, instead sending his servants, the locals were not intimidated and felt emboldened to harass him. However, the third time, when Yitzchak personally took charge and stood up to them, the people were intimidated and left him alone. The Torah indicates this shift by highlighting that the first two times it was Yitzchak's servants who dug the wells, whereas the third time Yitzchak himself took up the

task, signifying his assertiveness and willingness to put himself on the line.

The Torah seems to impart the message that we should not allow people to harass us repeatedly. For instance, when Avraham Avinu defensively claims Sarah is his sister, she is kidnapped twice, by Avimelech and Paraoh. However, when Paraoh and Avimelech are afflicted, they promptly return her and insist that no one should touch her. In another



instance, during the war between the kings, when Lot is kidnapped, Avraham Avinu bravely wages war against armies much larger and stronger than his own. Remarkably, he prevails when on the offensive. Similarly, when Shimon and Levi stand up for their sister's honor, no one dares to confront them. Despite Yaakov Avinu's initial fear of the surrounding nations, when facing danger, he prepares for war.

This suggests that confronting danger provides a better chance of overcoming it, whereas cowering away might result in the danger chasing you relentlessly.

Applying this message to our time, it becomes evident that when we avoid confronting dangers and allow them to fester, they tend to resurface and pose significant challenges. The prudent approach is to address and eliminate these dangers before they grow too formidable to manage, ensuring their eradication.

BIRTH OF ISHMAEL: UNRAVELING THE ENIGMA SURROUNDING AVRAHAM'S OFFSPRING.

In this article, we will address the intriguing question of how two children—Yitzchak and Ishmael—both born to the same father, Avraham, manifested as polar opposites: one embodying the epitome of goodness and purity, while the other represented the pinnacle of malevolence and savagery.

Parashat Toldot begins with the verse stating that Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak. The apparent question arises: it is not Avraham who gives birth, but Sarah. What message, then, is the Torah trying to convey? (Refer to Rashi for one perspective; however, let's explore alternative interpretations). To further understand this, one must also answer a rather unsettling question: How is it possible that



such a great Tzaddik like Avraham had a child like Ishmael (just as one may ask regarding how Yitzchak can have a son like Esav)? Additionally, why did Sarah give Hagar to Avraham—which woman would give another woman as a wife to her husband, especially someone as lowly as Hagar?

One of the greatest early mekubalim, Rabbi Yosef Gikatila (שערי אורה שער חמישי ד"ה דע כי כשחטא), sheds light on this matter and provides a comprehensive understanding of what transpired. He begins with an introduction, explaining that when Adam Harishon sinned, a poison entered his soul—a poison identical to the one the serpent introduced to Chava. This poison was a dense and significant impurity, and it was transmitted to his children and all subsequent generations.

To eliminate this impurity, there was a necessity to separate the undesirable from the virtuous. Each righteous person in every generation contributed to this process of distinguishing between the negative and positive elements. The conclusive stages of this purification occurred through the actions of the Avot. Avraham gave birth to Ishmael, thereby releasing a significant portion of the negative influence to Ishmael. Yitzchak similarly did so with Esav. Following these separations, Yaakov emerged completely free of any impurity.

The Chida (פני דוד לך לך טו) explains that this was the reason Sarah did not conceive until after Hagar. She, with her divine insight, perceived that her husband needed to be cleansed of the poison descended from Adam. Therefore, she gave Hagar to him for this purpose. Only after Ishmael was born did she see that Avraham was ready to bring forth a pure soul.

According to Midrash Raba (מהד), Hagar's immediate ability to give birth was likened to the ease and quick

attainment of worthless things, akin to thorns in a field that grow abundantly, in contrast to the difficulty of growing grain. The Arizal (טז, לך לך, טז) further elaborates, comparing Sarah and Hagar to fruits and peels. Just as the peel grows first and paves the way for the fruit, Hagar had to give birth first before Sarah could conceive.

The Zohar (וירא ח"א ק"ח) emphasizes that once Yitzchak was born, Ishmael is never mentioned in the Torah by name. The Zohar suggests that this omission is deliberate, as one does not mention the inferior (trash) in the presence of the superior (gold), symbolizing Yitzchak's elevated status. Furthermore, Sarah explicitly told Avraham that

Ishmael was not his son but Hagar's. While initially treating Ishmael as his own, Avraham received divine confirmation that Sarah was correct – Ishmael is not his son (אור החיים, כא, יא). As explained earlier, since Ishmael was born to expel negative forces from Avraham, he is considered Hagar's son and not Avraham's.

Due to this reason, the Ohr HaChayim (תחילת תולדות) explains that Yitzchak occupied a higher spiritual level than Avraham. While Avraham still bore the negativities inherited from his father, he was cleared of them by releasing them through Ishmael. In contrast, Yitzchak had already been purified from such negative forces.

The Arizal and the Chida offer an alternative explanation. When Hagar initially conceived, her embryo was expected to be exceptionally malevolent as it solely carried Hagar's lineage, potentially more sinister than Ishmael. To counteract this, Sarah employed the "ayin hara" (evil eye), resulting in Hagar experiencing a miscarriage. As previously explained, Esav also bore the remaining negative impurity within Yitzchak. Thus, the combination of the two potentially evil forces—Ishmael and Esav—could have been formidable. In a symbolic alignment, towards the end of the parasha, Esav marries the daughter of Ishmael, accentuating the connection between these two influences.

Now we can comprehend that Avraham, carrying the negative energies from Adam Harishon, sought purification. He transferred the negative aspects to Ishmael while endowing Yitzchak with the positive nature. The residual negativity left by Yitzchak was entrusted to Esav, leaving him pure and holy for Yaakov. Rabbi Yosef Gikatila elaborates that Yaakov, uncertain of his complete purification, approached his twelve children on his deathbed. He inquired if any negativity lingered, and they reassured him, collec-

BIRTH OF ISHMAEL: UNRAVELING THE ENIGMA SURROUNDING AVRAHAM'S OFFSPRING.

tively affirming their purity with the recitation of Shema Yisrael. This perspective also elucidates the brothers' reaction to Yosef; they mistakenly believed he absorbed Yaakov's remaining negative powers, prompting their attempt to eliminate him, unaware that Yaakov was already purified.

WARFARE AND TORAH COMMANDMENTS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT.

Let's analyze some of the relevant questions regarding the ongoing war. obligated to wage. Indeed, it was on Shabbat that Yehoshua conquered Yericho."

Question: Is this war considered a Mitzvah?

Answer: The Torah delineates two types of wars—obligatory (Mitzvah) and voluntary (not obligated). Distinct halachic guidelines govern each, necessitating an understanding of the status of the particular war in question.

The Rambam writes: What is considered a milchemet Mitzvah (obligatory war)? The war against the seven nations who occupied Eretz Yisrael, the war against Amalek, and a war fought to assist Israel from an enemy which attacks them.

There is no need to seek the permission of the court to wage a milchemet Mitzvah. Rather, he may go out on his own volition and force the nation to go out with him. In contrast, he may not lead the nation out to wage a milchemet hareshut (voluntary war) unless the court of seventy-one judges approves.

In another context, the Rambam elucidates the concept of what constitutes a milchemet Mitzvah. He writes: "What is meant by 'the distress that the enemies of the Jews cause the Jews'? When gentiles come to wage war against the Jews, to impose a tax upon them, or to take land away from them."

Question: Can the army continue fighting on Shabbat?

Answer: Yes, especially in scenarios where not fighting might endanger the lives of soldiers or civilians, and when stopping the fighting would strengthen the enemy, allowing them to empower and replenish their arsenal. Even without these considerations, the Torah commands to continue a war until the total surrender and defeat of the enemy.

The Rambam writes (Shabbat 2,25): "Laying siege to gentile cities should be initiated at least three days before the Shabbat. We may wage war with them on any day, even on the Shabbat, until we conquer the city, even if the war is voluntary in nature. Our tradition interprets [Devarim 20:20] 'until you have subjugated it,' as teaching that [one should wage war] even on the Shabbat.

Surely then, does the above apply regarding a war that we are

He repeats the same (Melachim 6,11): "We should lay siege to the gentiles' cities at least three days before Shabbat. We may engage in battle with them every day, even on the Shabbat, as it states: 'against the city waging war with you until you subjugate it.' Our Sages explain: this implies 'even on Shabbat.' This applies to both a *milchemet mitzvah* and a *milchemet hareshut*".



This halacha, concerning not starting three days prior to Shabbat, applies specifically to a milchemet hareshut (voluntary war). However, in the case of a milchemet Mitzvah, as explained above when the enemies are attacking us, the Tur (siman 249) states that we should proceed even in the midst of the Shabbat day.

Shabbat as day of prayer

May a shul conduct prayer services for the war, such as public Tehilim reading, that will take place on Shabbat?

Answer: Shabbat is a day of joy and happiness; therefore, one should refrain from offering private prayers and requests that remind a person of painful events, disrupting their joy. However, exceptions are made in times of crises, such as for a severely ill person, a terrible event, or during a war. In such dire situations, prayers are permitted.

Although prayers are permitted at such times, it is advisable to schedule them on weekdays. In exceptionally challenging times, the community may collectively engage in daily prayers, including on Shabbat.

It seems incorrect, however, to designate Shabbat as the exclusive day for special prayers without including weekdays. The Gemara indicates that Chazal were initially reluctant to permit visiting the sick on Shabbat, allowing it only with difficulty. The concern was that visitors might cry out to Hashem for the patient's recovery, highlighting the severity of praying on Shabbat. The Mishna Brura (סימן רפז) emphasizes that waiting until weekdays and visiting on Shabbat is therefore incorrect.

WARFARE AND TORAH COMMANDMENTS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT.

The Biur Halacha states that if a visitor went on a weekday, question of praying on Shabbat where people gather due to then he may also go visit the sick on Shabbat, but the poskim available time, it is apparent that one should not initiate such didn't favor the idea of a person visiting only on Shabbat. an event exclusively for Shabbat.

While there might be differences between this case and the

השבת השחורה

הזמן וכן על שם הפרוכת השחורה שהיו מכסים בה את ארון הקודש. וכן לשבת הסמוכה לכ"ג באייר שהיה יום תענית ציבור, זכר לשחיתות ולהשמדות בשנת תתנ"ו (מובא גם בלוח דבר בעתו). וכן קראו כך לשבת הל' בסיון תש"ו בגלל המאסרים הרבים ביישוב שביצע הצבא הבריטי ופלישתו לבית הסוכנות היהודית בירושלים.



אכן שמעתי שיש שקוראים לאותה שבת, שבת הארורה, וזה ודאי שאסור לעשות שהרי זה נחשב כמקלל את יום השבת הקדושה ח"ו, ודי לנו במה שמצאנו בדברי הקדמונים ולא לדבר סרה.

זאת ועוד, שיש לדעת שאנחנו מאמינים בני מאמינים, ויודעים אנו שכל מאי דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד, ושהכל נעשה לטובה, ואף שקשה לנו להבין זאת. שמעתי בשם אחד הרבנים החשובים שכשעוברים דבר קשה לא לומר שהדבר רע כיון שאין הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה דברים רעים, אבל מותר לומר שהדבר מר, כי אז הדבר מתייחס אלינו, שלנו קשה לעכל את הגלולה המרה. ויהי רצון שהדוש ברוך הוא יאמר לצרותינו די, וישלח מהרה את משיח צדקנו.

שלום לכבוד הרב. רב תודות על פינה ההלכה החשובה. אחר הטבח שקרה בשבת שמחת תורה נדבק ליום הזה השם 'השבת השחורה', ואני תמיד מסופק אם מותר וראוי לקרוא ליום הקדוש- יום השבת בשם שחור. אשמח לקבל מענה.

שלום לכם.

אכן שאלה זו היא שאלה קשה שכן מצד אחד יום השבת הוא יום של שמחה ועונג, ואיך נקרא לו בשמות שליליים. אולם מאידך קשה להתייחס ליום קשה שכזה כאילו היה יום שבת מן המניין.

אלא שמצאנו במנהגי עדות האשכנזים הקדמונים שהיו קוראים לימי שבת שנעשו בהם אסונות בשם 'שבת השחורה', או באידיש 'שווארץ שבת', וכמו שמצאנו בספרו של יום טוב לינסקי (שבתות מיוחדות עמוד 7) שבעיתים שירדו אסונות על הציבור כגון פוגרומים או מגיפות היו מכריזים על 'שבת שחורה', וכל העם השביתו את שמחת השבת והיתה נפשם עגומה עליהם. כמו כן הביא (עמוד 34) ששבת תשעה באב היתה נקראית 'שבת השחורה' בעבור האבל והיגון שנהגו באותו

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