

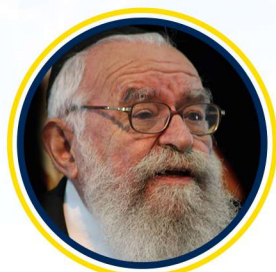


Yeshivat Har Etzion – Israel Koschitzky VBM Parsha Digest 9 Parashat Toledot 5779

Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Indeed, in the Ramban's view, the institution [of yeshivot hesder] can be traced back to our very fountainhead. In explaining why Avimelekh was so anxious to conclude a treaty with Yitzhak, he conjectures that it may have been due to the fact "that Avraham was very great and mighty... and he was a lion-hearted soldier.... And the son emulated the father, as Yitzhak was great like his father..." -Harav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l



Parashat Toledot "And May God Give You of the Dew of the Heavens"

Based on a Sichva by Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/and-may-god-give-you-dew-heavens>

"And may God give you (ve-yiten lekha) of the dew of the heavens and of the fat of the earth, and much grain and wine." (Ber. 27:28) Rashi is bothered by the blessing starting with the conjunctive "vav" (meaning "and"). One might suggest that it is meant to connect the blessing to the preceding verse: "He drew near and he kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him, saying: Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that has been blessed by God" (27:27).

Yaakov was wearing the garments that Rivka took from Esav (27:15). The midrash comments on this: "Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: All my life I waited upon my father, but I never served him a hundredth as well as Esav served his father.... Esav, when he waited upon his father, would only serve him in fine robes. He would say: It is not honorable that I serve my father in fine robes...." (B. Rabba 62:16)

Esav excelled at the mitzva of honoring his parents, but not at other commandments. He fulfilled certain mitzvot, but only in the sense of "the fragrance of his clothes": it was external to him. Yaakov, on the other hand, was full of mitzvot; for him, fulfilling the will of God was his whole essence – "the fragrance of my son." Thus, Yitzhak's blessing to Yaakov is that mitzvot should be intrinsic to him, like "the fragrance of my son," and to this he adds: "And may God give you...."

Rashi offers a different explanation for the conjunctive 'vav' in the word, "ve-yiten." He cites a midrash that says, "'Ve-yiten lekha' – may He give, and give again" (Bereishit Rabba 66:3). Let us analyze the message of this midrash.

Rabbi Bunim of Peshiskhe asks, concerning the curse of the snake, "You shall go upon your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life" (Bereishit 3:14): What kind of curse is this? The snake is being promised that its food will always be readily available; it will never have to search for it! The curse, he explains, is that since the snake will always have food, it will never feel itself to be in need of God's mercies, and will never have the opportunity to pray to Him.

Concerning Eretz Yisrael, the Torah tells us: "It is not like the land of Egypt... where you sow your seeds and water it with your foot,... It is a land of hills and valleys; you will drink water from the rain of the heavens. It is a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (Devarim 11:10-12)

In contrast to the land of Egypt, Eretz Yisrael does not have a permanent, reliable source of water. It is dependent on rain, and therefore Am Yisrael must pray to God to bring rain. God could have chosen any country. He could have led Am Yisrael to a quiet,

deserted place with no troubles or concerns, a place blessed with abundant resources. However, in His infinite wisdom, He chose Eretz Yisrael – a land of complicated political, economic and defense issues; a land in need of Divine mercy, dependent upon God. "God's eyes" are truly "upon this land" at all times, as it constantly needs Him. Every year, all winter, we add special prayers for rain.

Esav was blessed that "your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of the heavens from above" (27:39) – a permanent state of material abundance. Yaakov, in contrast, is given the blessing, "And may God give you of the dew of the heavens." His sustenance is dependent upon God.

"May He give, and give again" – in the case of Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, God "gives" each time anew. Every year we pray to Him, and every year He provides for our needs.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Toldot 5756 [1995]. Adapted by Matan Glidai, Translated by Kaeren Fish)



Parashat Toledot

"Avraham Bore Yitzchak..."

By Prof. Yonatan Grossman

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/avraham-bore-yitzchak>

Our parasha features the narrative in which Yitzchak is the central figure. The Torah recounts very few stories about Yitzchak, and in fact Yitzchak is the dominant character in the events of only one chapter - chapter 26. Thereafter, Yaakov takes the spotlight, and from then on, the Torah recounts his life (although Yitzchak lives on for many more years).

Let us analyze those actions of Yitzchak's which the Torah recounts and describes. In reading these stories, we are reminded repeatedly of Avraham. This similarity is not simply coincidental, as the Torah hints at the connection, sometimes making it explicit.

At the beginning of the stories about Yitzchak (chapter 26) we hear of the famine in the land, owing to which Yitzchak moves to Gerar. The Torah stresses there: "And there was a famine in the land, other than the first famine which was in the days of Avraham." Why is this emphasis necessary? The previous famine took place before Yitzchak was born! Apparently, the Torah wishes to associate this famine with those that afflicted Avraham, forcing him to wander to Egypt and to Gerar.

Yitzchak, as mentioned, moves to Gerar, but from God's words to him ("Do not descend to Egypt") we deduce that he initially thought to head for Egypt. Thus, the Torah hints at both of Avraham descents as a result of famine (Egypt and Gerar) in this descent.

We are also reminded of Avraham in both blessings which Yitzchak receives. The first takes place before his departure for Gerar; the second as he leaves Gerar. The first is basically a repetition of the vow which God makes to Avraham following the Akeda, as stated: "And I shall establish the vow which I swore to Avraham your father" (26:3). This is not a new promise made to Yitzchak, and it seems that Yitzchak receives this berakha by his father's merit: "Because Avraham listened to My voice and kept my charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws" (26:5). A comparison of the language used in the two vows highlights the parallelism:

God's Promise to Avraham (at the Akeda, 22:16-19):

I shall surely multiply your descendants like the stars of the heaven,
and your descendants shall inherit the gate of their enemies,
and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed through your descendants
because you have listened to My voice.

Yitzchak's second blessing is also given in Avraham's merit: "And God appeared to him that night and said, I am the Lord of Avraham your father; Fear not for I am with you, and I shall bless you and shall multiply your descendants for the sake of Avraham My servant."

The next part of the story of Yitzchak continues to follow the account of Avraham's life: The claim that "She is my sister," when Yitzchak fears that he will be killed for Rivka, mirrors Avraham's problems with exactly the same king, Avimelekh, as well as with Pharaoh (though the narrative develops differently, as we shall discuss). Following the rapprochement between Yitzchak and Avimelekh they enter into a covenant which parallels the covenant forged between Avraham and Avimelekh.

Between these episodes, the Torah points to another comparison between father and son, concerning the digging of the wells. Here the Torah emphasizes that Yitzchak dug out "the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Avraham his father," since "all the wells which the servants of his father dug in the days of Avraham, his father, had been sealed up by the Pelishtim" (26:18, 15).

Moreover, Yitzchak stresses this connection by naming the wells "names like those names which his father had called them." And just as the servants of Avimelekh stole Abraham's wells (21:25), they once again steal those dug by the servants of Yitzchak.

This in effect summarizes Yitzchak's public activity as described in the Torah; we have seen how the events of his life closely parallel those of his father's life (other than Yitzchak's successful planting, and the great abundance with which God blesses him) and how the Torah draws our attention to this. What is the significance of this great similarity between the lives of these two forefathers?

We have hinted above at Yitzchak's status as the continuation of his father rather than as the initiator of a new path. But beyond this, let us examine the details of the principal relationship described in the chapter, the relationship of Yitzchak and Avimelekh.

In order to understand the significance of the story, let us first turn to the similar circumstances involving Abraham (20:1-18).

Following God's message to Avimelekh in a dream, Avimelekh rebukes Abraham, raising a moral problem, as he recognizes the "great sin" to take a married woman, and Abraham nearly led him to transgress this grave sin (20:9). Abraham answers that the citizens of Gerar violate the moral standard, evoking the lack of "fear of God" (meaning personal conscience or natural morality) in Gerar. There is a moral conflict between Abraham and Avimelekh, with each claiming that the other has an ethical defect. The Torah does not pass explicit judgment, but seems to hint in support to Avimelekh. While Abraham questions the fear of God in Gerar, the Torah states that when Avimelekh tells his servants what transpired, they are "very fearful," implying that there is moral conscience.

Furthermore, Avimelekh poses a question to God, raising concern for Divine justice (20:4), that is strikingly similar to Abraham's question to God before the destruction of Sodom (18:23). In the argument over the fate of Sodom, Abraham is presented as a moral pillar with whom God "consults" (18:19). This status of Abraham is now threatened by Avimelekh, who is also presented as a moral character seeking justice. Whatever his motivation, Avimelekh is presented as a character who performs kindness. Despite Abraham's actions, which almost caused him to transgress a "great sin," Avimelekh nevertheless gives him sheep, cattle, servants, and even offers him land. Avimelekh offers Abraham the opportunity to live in his country, and plies him with gifts. This story seems to glorify Avimelekh at the expense of Abraham's unique moral stature. It is true that immediately thereafter we read of the theft of Abraham's wells by Avimelekh's servants, and the position of the two characters is abruptly exchanged - Abraham now chides Avimelekh (21:25) while Avimelekh is forced to excuse and defend this theft. Nevertheless, Abraham gives Avimelekh sheep and cattle, just as Avimelekh previously gave him gifts. On the basis of this reciprocity Abraham and Avimelekh make a covenant as equals, facing each other on equal footing in terms of their moral values.

Against this backdrop, Yitzchak descends to Gerar, but this time it is clear who holds the upper hand in the moral conflict. We can now show this by examining the differences between the Abraham-Avimelekh relationship and the Yitzchak-Avimelekh relationship.

First of all, in the Yitzchak story, Rivka is not taken to Avimelekh's palace, such that the moral problem applies to a lesser degree than it did regarding Abraham. Secondly, Avimelekh neither presents Yitzchak with gifts nor offers him his land, but rather banishes Yitzchak from the country (26:16). His servants, however, once again steal the wells which Yitzchak's servants have dug.

If there was some moral ambiguity in the conflict between Abraham and Avimelekh, Yitzchak emerges as morally stronger in his conflict with Avimelekh. This conclusion is supported by the respective covenants forged with Avimelekh: When Avimelekh suggests to Abraham that they forge a covenant, he mentions the favors he performed (21:23). In light of Avimelekh's kindness, Abraham feels duty-bound to respond favorably to his request. Avimelekh's request to Yitzchak pales in comparison: "Lest you perform evil towards me, when we have not harmed you and we have done you only good, and we are sending you in peace" (26:29). In addressing Yitzchak, he can mention only that "we have not harmed you." While he reminds Abraham that he has dwelt in the land, he can mention to Yitzchak only the fact that he is being sent away cordially - "and we are sending you in peace." Yitzchak owes Avimelekh no favors, entering the covenant from a position of strength. Finally, Avimelekh returns to Gerar after forging the covenant with Abraham at his own initiative: "And Avimelekh rose up... and returned to the land of the Pelishtim." Following the covenant with Yitzchak, Avimelekh is portrayed as passive, subject to Yitzchak's will: "And Yitzchak sent them, and they went from him in peace."

Yitzchak's status indeed differs from Abraham's. He acts as Abraham's successor, but let us not think that in doing so, he simply repeats his father's actions. In retracing his father's footsteps, he closes circles which were left open and which require a decisive conclusion. The question of who is considered moral is a critical one in Sefer Bereishit, since God states explicitly that the choice of Abraham as the progenitor of a new nation is bound up with the moral world he has passed on to his descendants (18:19). A challenge to Abraham's moral foundations, or the claim that another person equally represents them, could threaten his special status and selection. Therefore, the Torah clarifies and emphasizes that in this moral conflict, Abraham and his descendants ultimately prevailed.



Haftarat Toledot: “Rejoice with Trembling”

By Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein

Based on: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/toldot-rejoice-trembling>

"YET I LOVED YAAKOV, AND I HATED ESAV"

The haftara for Parashat Toledot (Malakhi 1:1-2:7) opens with the selection of Israel, God's love for Yaakov, and His preference for Yaakov over Esav. In the opening verse, which is studied as a primary source for the chosenness of Israel in Jewish thought, the prophet proclaims: "I have loved you, says the Lord. Yet you say: In what have You loved us? Was not Esav Yaakov's brother? says the Lord: yet I loved Yaakov. And I hated Esav."

The prophet seems to assert that the choice of Yaakov and rejection of Esav are two sides of the same coin, meaning that the selection of the one (Yaakov) necessitated the rejection of the other (Esav). However, if we examine the passage and note the punctuation, we see that the verse does not combine the two clauses into a single unit, but rather it separates between them. God's love for Yaakov does not necessitate His hatred of Esav. God could love Yaakov without hating Esav, relating to him neutrally, with neither love nor hate. As such, God's stated hatred of Esav is separate from His proclaimed love of Yaakov. The second verse, which deals with Esav's relationship with God, opens with an additional, independent assertion: "And I hated Esav, and laid his mountains waste, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness" (1:3). This assertion does not follow from God's love of Yaakov, but rather it results from Esav's actions and wickedness, as implied by the verse describing Esav's border as the "border of wickedness."

LOVE THAT DOES NOT NEGATE

The heart of the matter is that the selection of Israel is not a negation of the value of the other nations, but rather a unique relationship to God that is reserved for the people of Israel. Just as one's love for his own sons and daughters does not negate the value of other children, but rather it establishes a unique relationship with those who are closest to him, and just as love for a friend does not imply hate for others, so too the selection of Israel and the love for the seed of Yaakov does not detract from the value of the other nations or from their own relationships with God. That relationship is evaluated by their own actions. Therefore, the love for Yaakov need not detract from Esav's lot; rather, it was Esav's sin, his own actions, that cause him to be hated by God.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YITZCHAK AND MALAKHI?

One can see this dynamic in our parasha. Yaakov receives a blessing, but Esav could still be blessed based on his own level, as he himself argues: "Have you but one blessing, my father; bless me, even me also, my father" (Ber. 27:38). However, Yaakov's taking the blessing is maddening to Esav, and he falls from disappointment into wickedness, malice and bloodthirstiness.

Thus, the prophet's reaction to Esav is far sharper than what is implied by Yitzchak's blessing. Yitzchak removed Esav from the birthright and established the relative superiority and inferiority between the two brothers, but this is not reason to punish him. In the haftara, in contrast, the attitude to Esav is one of fury (1:3-4).

The reason for the difference in attitude toward Esav between Yitzchak and Malakhi is clear: Esav's later development. Yitzchak does not see Esav as a negative personality, but rather as a figure whose blessings were denied him; he, therefore, has no reason to be angry with him. The prophet, on the other hand, takes into consideration the wicked acts of Esav who oppresses Yaakov, and of Esav's descendants who follow in his ways. Taking this perspective, seeing that Esav tries to destroy everything that is good, it follows that the prophet is enraged by him and designates his border as the "border of wickedness."

Following the prophet's harsh rebuke (verse 4), Esav exits the scene and Malakhi focuses on the people of Israel. He delivers a lengthy reproach to the people for defiling the sacrifices and the Temple. The prophet has seemingly opened a new front. He began with the selection of Israel, and now, he turns to a new topic – the way a person who brings a sacrifice relates to his offering and to God. Thus, we might have expected Malakhi's second prophecy to constitute an independent unit that is detached from the issue of the selection of Israel. Surely the reproach for offering sacrifices without the appropriate inner intentions is a familiar motif that

appears prominently in several places in Scripture, and is not connected to the issue of the selection of Israel elsewhere.

In our haftara, however, both its form and its content, the prophet chose to combine the two topics. First, there is no indication of any kind of stop between the two discussions, as it is written as one continuous paragraph and as a prophecy dealing with a single issue. More important is the mention of the other nations in the continuation of the haftara, when the prophet castigates Israel, saying that God does not need their sacrifices and meal-offerings, because of the respect shown to Him by the nations (1:10-11).

BELOVED SERVANT

In order to understand the connection between the selection of Israel and the problem of the sacrifices, we must consider the matter in the framework of the wider issue of the relationship between God and man. Scripture presents us with two basic models for the man-God relationship. The first sees man as a created being who is obligated to his Maker, as a small and lowly creature standing before the King of kings. God is the master and man is His obedient servant. Man's relationship with God is defined by the fact that he is commanded and obligated.

Alongside this perception, Scripture also presents a second model of nearness and intimacy, in which man and God are exceedingly close. The clearest expression of this approach is the book of Shir Ha-shirim which likens the relations between man and God to the relations between a loving couple. God appears as a doting lover who brings man into His inner chambers. This perspective emphasizes the love that draws man near to God, that God loves us in a great and everlasting way. As noted above, this principle runs throughout Scripture, is foundational to our relationship with God, and is the basis of many issues and mitzvot.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

The double relationship that is founded on love and fear is unique to Israel, whereas the relationship that the other nations have with God is based on the principle of fear. The underlying assumption of this argument is that the basic relationship between man and God is the model of fear. God's transcendence constitutes man's metaphysical foundation; his dependence, obligation, weakness, and transience standing before God's eternity and infinity dictate man's standing in the world. This is a universal condition affecting all men, Jew and gentile alike.

In contrast, the foundation of love is not man's standing but God's desire, as He gives more than man deserves. Moreover, this closeness is directed to the people of Israel as a nation, and not as individuals, and therefore it would be most correct to say that this reflects a difference between the people of Israel and the other nations of the world. The people of Israel are God's chosen people, it is they whom He chose out of His love for them, and thus this aspect of love is part of His relationship with them.

SACRIFICES

These two models lead to two different understandings of the sacrifices. Sacrifices may be perceived from a fear-based perspective: a person offers a sacrifice to appease God and atone for his soul. As the Ramban explains in his explanation of the reason for the sacrifices, sacrifices constitute a substitution and a ransom (Commentary to Vayikra 1:8).

According to a second understanding, sacrifices express man's love for God. Just as a husband and wife present each other with gifts as an expression of their love – the gift not being the essence, but merely an illustration of the love – so man brings an offering to God as an expression of his love. This seems to be the principle underlying the concept of “sweet savor” describing sacrifices, as expressed by the Ramban's comment that “every sacrifice [korban] denotes closeness [kirva] and union.”

These two principles are interwoven throughout the laws of the sacrifices. One striking example of this relates to the sacrifice of a non-Jew. A non-Jew can offer a sacrifice, but it is governed by laws different than those that govern the sacrifice of a Jew. We will note one law that highlights how the sacrifices of a non-Jew express the element of fear. According to Rav Huna in the Gemara in Menachot (73b), the peace-offerings of a non-Jew are offered as whole-burnt offerings. This is because the standard, joint consumption of peace-offerings by man and God expresses nearness and intimacy, whereas a whole-burnt offering is expressive of the quality of fear, as it is consumed entirely by the fire of the Shekhina.

NEITHER THIS NOR THAT

We now return to the words of the prophet. The prophecy opens with God's love for Israel and His hatred for Esav. The subject of

the prophecy is the love and intimacy between God and His people. In light of what is stated in the continuation, we can say that both Esav and Israel are subservient to God as a slave to his master and like a subject to his king, but Israel has the added element of nearness and intimacy that stems from love.

Malakhi confronts the feeling expressed by the people that their selection lacks meaning. In light of this, he examines the service in the Temple that had just been rebuilt, and the sacrificial order that had just been restored from the two aforementioned perspectives. A sacrifice can serve as an expression of love and of fear, but Malakhi reveals that the actions of Israel express neither of these. He opens by checking whether the sacrifices express man's subservience to God, reflecting the quality of fear: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is My honor; and if I am a master, where is My fear?" (1:6). The priests are denigrated as "those who despise the name of God," a lack of proper fear, as honor and disgrace are indicative of a formal relationship, rather than intimacy. This line of thought continues in the coming verses, and finds its main expression in verse 8: "And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer a lame or sick animal, is that not evil? Offer it now to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or will he show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts."

The contrast and the fury relate to the absence of fear of heaven, comparing sacrifices to an offering to the governor. The relationship with the governor is one of fear, and thus failure in the offering of sacrifices is a failure in the fear of the Divine King.

ATONEMENT FOR DESPISING THE NAME OF GOD

The prophet continues that atonement for Israel's attitude regarding sacrifices will come when Israel prays to God and petitions for mercy, as one petitions a mortal king who has the power to decide between life and death. The situation of the Jewish people is contrasted to what is happening among the nations, who recognize the greatness of the Creator and burn incense to His name (1:11).

The rebuke seems to relate to Israel's conduct and lack of recognition of God's kingship, but between the lines there is an additional reproach connected to the quality of love. Before Israel complain about the absence of God's love, they should note that their conduct in offering sacrifices shows a lack of love. For one who offers a defective sacrifice displays an absence of love for the Recipient of the offering. Thus, their argument regarding love reveals another distortion, namely, the desire for love when they fail to recognize God's kingdom and the need to fear Him. It is impossible to talk about God's love for a person who does not recognize his own place, as the love becomes distorted; it is not the love of the lofty Creator who mercifully connects to His creatures, but rather love conceived as coming from an equal. This idea seems to find its way into the verse: "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering at your hand" (1:10), where the emphasis is on pleasure and acceptance.

The use that is made throughout the haftara of the term, "Lord of hosts," should also be seen as coming to emphasize the necessary combination of love and fear. Malakhi uses this combination because it gives expression to the Tetragrammaton – the quality of mercy and love – combining it with the power and greatness of the Creator as ruler over the hosts of heaven and earth. The prophet's message is clear – loving God is possible only out of the recognition of His loftiness and exaltation.

The contrast with the other nations appears in yet another verse (1:14), emphasizing Israel's failure regarding fear of heaven, and also alluding to the fact that if Israel disregards its obligation of love, God will manage with the nations as King of the world, without the love of Israel.

SUMMARY

In summary, the haftara opens with love, but ends with fear, for love without fear is not legitimate, because it diminishes the glory of heaven and the meaning of love. It is not by chance that the Rambam joined them together (Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah 2:1-2) as a single essence and an interwoven experience, and refused to separate between them (though he counted them as two separate mitzvot). However, the actions of Israel, who express their astonishment over the absence of God's love, reveal that they do not really understand the essence of fear.

After finishing with the rebuke of Israel, the haftara turns to the priests, instructing them to give glory to His name, speaking about the covenant based on the fear of God (2:5). It should, however, be added and emphasized that the proper foundation of fear will allow love to find its place, and then it will be possible to fulfill the prayer of the psalmist: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Tehilim 2:11).

(Translated by David Strauss)

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