



TOLDOT

WHEN IN DOUBT, JUST BE NICE

*All Things Being Equal, Generosity Wins the Day*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Toldot*

Isaac and Rebecca endure twenty childless years until their prayers are answered and Rebecca conceives. She experiences a difficult pregnancy as the “children struggle inside her”; G-d tells her that “there are two nations in your womb,” and that the younger will prevail over the elder. Esau emerges first; Jacob is born clutching Esau’s heel. Esau grows up to be “a cunning hunter, a man of the field”; Jacob is “a whole- some man,” a dweller in the tents of learning. Isaac favors Esau; Rebecca loves Jacob. Returning exhausted and hungry from the hunt one day, Esau sells his birthright (his rights as the firstborn) to Jacob for a pot of red lentil stew. In Gerar, in the land of the Philistines, Isaac presents Rebecca as his sister out of fear that he will be killed by someone coveting her beauty. He farms the land, reopens the wells dug by his father, Abraham, and digs a series of his own wells. Over the first two there is strife with the Philistines, but the waters of the new wells are enjoyed in tranquility. Esau marries two Hittite women. Isaac grows old and blind and expresses his desire to bless Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father’s favorite food, Rebecca dresses Jacob in Esau’s clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father. Jacob receives his father’s blessings for “the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land” and mastery over his brother. When Esau returns and the deception is revealed, all Isaac can do for his weeping son is predict that he will live by his sword, and that when Jacob falters, the younger brother will forfeit his supremacy over the elder. Jacob leaves home for Haran to flee Esau’s wrath and to find a wife in the family of his mother’s brother, Laban. Esau marries a third wife—Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael.



Is it “nice” to  
give money to a  
drug addict?

# TEXT 1A

*Genesis 25:19*

וַיֵּאָלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן אֲבִרְהָם אֲבִרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק

And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac.

# TEXT 1B

*Rashi, Genesis 25:19*

"אברהם הוליד את יצחק". על ידי שכתב הכתוב "יצחק בן אברהם", הוזקק לומר "אברהם הוליד את יצחק". לפי שהיו ליצני הדור אומרים מאבימלך נתעברה שרה, שהרי כמה שנים שהתה עם אברהם ולא נתעברה הימנו.

מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא

צר קלסתר פניו של יצחק דומה לאברהם, והעידו הכל "אברהם הוליד את יצחק". וזהו "שכתב כאן "יצחק בן אברהם" היה, שהרי עדות יש ש"אברהם הוליד את יצחק

"Abraham begot Isaac." Since Scripture wrote, "Isaac the son of Abraham," it had to say, "Abraham begot Isaac," because the scorners of the generation were saying that Sarah had conceived from Abimelech, for she had lived with Abraham for many years and had not conceived from him.

What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do?

He shaped the features of Isaac's face to resemble Abraham's, and everyone attested that Abraham had begotten Isaac. This is the meaning of what is written here, "Isaac the son of Abraham," because here is proof that "Abraham begot Isaac."

## QUESTIONS

Why did it take  
a miracle for  
Isaac to look  
like his father?

Don't children  
naturally look  
like their  
parents?



# TEXT 2

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman  
of Liadi, Tanya, Igeret  
Hakodesh, ch. 13*

הנה בכלל עובדי ה' יש ב' בחינות  
ומדרגות חלוקות . . . דהיינו  
שבחינת שמאל היא מדת הצמצום  
וההסתר בעבודת ה' . . . והנה  
ממדה זו נמשכה גם כן בחינת  
הצמצום והגבול בעבודת ה', כמו  
בצדקה להיות נידון בהשג יד  
והמבזבז אל יבזבז יותר מחומש,  
וכהאי גוונא בתלמוד תורה ושאר  
מצות, די לו שיוצא ידי חובתו  
מחיוב מפורש שחייבתו  
התורה בפירוש לקבוע עתים כו'.

אך בחינת ימין היא מדת החסד  
וההתפשטות בעבודת ה'  
בהתרחבות בלי צמצום והסתר  
כלל . . . וגם בלי צמצום וגבול כלל  
ואין מעצור לרוח נדבתו, בין  
בצדקה ובין בתלמוד תורה ושאר  
מצות, ולא די לו לצאת ידי חובתו

There are two approaches when it comes to serving G-d. . . . One is the approach of the “left side,” which is associated with restraint and obstruction. . . . This approach fuels a type of service that is limited and constrained, such as giving charity only according to one’s means and not splurging on more than a set amount of one’s income. Similarly, such a person is measured with their Torah study, dedicating only the amount of time necessary to discharge their obligation, namely the fixed times explicitly prescribed in the Torah.

By contrast, an approach from the “right side” is associated with generosity and uninhibited expansiveness. . . . There is no obstruction or inhibition to this person’s generosity of spirit, whether it is in matters of charity or Torah study. They aren’t satisfied with simply discharging their obligation, but rather carrying on with no restraint.

# TEXT 3A

*Rabbi Elimelech of  
Lizensk, Noam  
Elimelech, Bereshit  
25:19*

ואלה תולדות יצחק בן אברהם כו' . . . דיצחק רמז לדין ואברהם רמז לחסד  
כידוע.

“These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham.” . . . Isaac is a prototype of discipline, whereas Abraham is a prototype of generosity, as is well-known.



# GENEROSITY



# DISCIPLINE



# TEXT 3B

*Rabbi Dovber of  
Lubavitch, Torat  
Chayim, Toldot 142a*

כתיב שמאלו תחת לראשי וימינו תחבקני. שמאלו תחת לראשי זהו  
'בחי' ומדריגת יצחק שהי' מרכבה לבחי' הגבורות העליונות שנק  
שמאלו שהוא בחי' קו השמאל בג"ה ואברהם הי' מרכבה לחסדים  
'העליונים בחי' קו הימין בחי' חח"ן וז"ש וימינו תחבקני כו

The verse states, “His left hand was under my head, and his right hand would embrace me” (Song of Songs 2:6). “His left hand was under my head” is a reference to Isaac, who was a vehicle for the supernal elements of discipline that are associated with the left side. Abraham was a vehicle for the supernal element of generosity, which is associated with the right, alluded to in the verse, “and his right hand would embrace me.”

# TEXT 4

*Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel of Lubavitch,  
Sefer Halikutim, Entry  
for Yishmael*

ישמעאל הוא בחינת חסד דקליפה דהיינו בחינת התפשטות שלו גדולה מאד, וכמו שכתוב בו בישמעאל "ידו בכל ויד כל בו". פירוש ידו בכל ותרגם אונקלס "הוא יהא צריך לכולא", רוצה לומר שצרכיו מרובים, ההיפך ממדת ההסתפקות

Ishmael is the archetype of an unholy generosity, possessing an insatiable spirit of expansiveness, as the verse states about him, “His hand is in everything and everything is in his hand” (Genesis 16:12). Unkelos translates “His hand is in everything” as “He needs everything.” In other words, he is very needy, the opposite of one who is content with what they have.

## QUESTIONS

Does that mean Avraham's path of generosity is wrong? Is Yitzchak right and his father wrong?

Who should we try to emulate when channeling our own personalities?



Having healthy  
balance is  
important.  
Nothing is  
good in the  
extreme.

Our soul traits  
mirror the  
spiritual traits  
that exist on high,  
in G-d Himself.



# TEXT 5

*Introduction to Tikunei  
Zohar, Patach Eliyahu*

פִּתַּח אֱלִיהוּ וְאָמַר:

רַבּוֹן עֲלָמִין דְּאַנְתָּ הוּא קָדֹד  
וְלֹא בְחֻשְׁבֹּן. אַנְתָּ הוּא  
עֲלָאָה עַל כָּל עֲלָאִין  
סְתִימָא עַל כָּל סְתִימִין  
לִית מַחְשְׁבָה תְּפִיסָא בְּךָ  
כָּלֵל.

אַנְתָּ הוּא דְּאַפְקֵת עֶשֶׂר  
תְּקוּנִין וְקָרִינֵן לִוְן עֶשֶׂר  
סְפִירָן לְאַנְהָגָא בְּהוּן  
עֲלָמִין סְתִימִין דְּלֹא  
אַתְגַּלִּין וְעֲלָמִין דְּאַתְגַּלִּין.  
וּבְהוּן אֶתְכַסִּיאת מְבִנֵּי

נֶשְׂאָ. וְאַנְתָּ הוּא דְּקָשִׁיר

The prophet Elijah, of blessed memory, opened, and said:

“Eternal Hidden Master of the worlds! You are He whose unity is infinite and absolute, and therefore indivisible. You are the First Cause, transcendent beyond all that is above, and concealed behind all that is concealed. No thought whatsoever can grasp You.

“You have brought forth ten rectifications—we call them the ten sefirot—with which to regulate [the powerful illumination of Your light that flows down through] hidden worlds that are not revealed, as well as worlds that are revealed. Indeed, it is through these that You are hidden from human beings [so they can exist and not be overwhelmed by Your light]. You are He who binds them and unifies them. . . .

“These ten sefirot are arranged in a special order, . . . as follows: Chesed (generosity) is the right arm; Gevurah (restraint) is the left arm.

# TEXT 6

*Rabbi Dovber of  
Lubavitch, Biurei  
HaZohar Admur  
Ha'emtza'i, Vayishlach  
20b*

אך לפי שהתלמידי חכמים  
יש ששרש נשמתן מבחינת  
אור החסד ויש ששרש  
נשמתן מבחינת הגבורה, על  
כן יכול להיות התחלקות  
שזה מטה כלפי חסד לטהר  
ולהכשיר, כי מצד שרש  
נשמתן לכך מביט ומשיג  
בארחות הוי' לחסד, כמו בית  
הלל שפוסקים תמיד לחסד  
להקל שיוכל אור אין סוף  
לשכון שם אם נעשה כך וכך  
באופן ההכשר. ובית שמאי  
מחמירים מצד שרש נשמתם  
שהיא מבחינת הגבורה, על  
כן מטה שכלם והשגתם  
להחמיר ולפסוק לטמא  
ולפסול לומר שבדרך כזה לא  
'ישכון אור אין סוף בו'.

Some scholars possess a soul rooted in the supernal attribute of Chesed, whereas other souls are rooted in Gevurah. That is why there are conflicting opinions, some ruling in a generous manner to render something pure or kosher. It is on account of each sage's soul-source that these sages view G-d's ways in a generous way. For example, Hillel would regularly issue lenient rulings. He was able to see how G-d's presence was able to manifest if affairs were conducted in a certain, kosher way. But Shamai was stricter, due to the root of his soul in Gevurah. That swayed his thought process to issue stricter rulings to render things impure or unkosher. He understood that, for such things, it was impossible for G-d to be manifest.





# TEXT 6

*Rabbi Dovber of  
Lubavitch, Biurei  
HaZohar Admur  
Ha'emtza'i, Vayishlach  
20b*

אבל כל התנאים ואמוראים היה פסק דין שלהם רק על פי הבטם בשרש  
החכמה שבתורה כמו שהוא למעלה, ועל פי אותה החכמה היו מעיינים  
'ומפקיחים איך יהיה הילוך ארחות ה

All the sages of the Talmudic era would render a Halachic decision based on  
how they understood the source of all Torah as it is on High and how it would  
manifest in this physical world.



Our soul  
traits impact  
how we  
think, act,  
and even  
how we look.

# TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 20, p. 103*

מראה הפנים איז פארבונדן מיט תכונות הנפש: א בעל חסד—איז בסבר פנים  
'יפות, א בעל גבורה—מיט א שטריינגען פנים וכו

A person's face is connected with the character of their soul. A generous and kind person displays a kind face, whereas a stern and reserved person has a sharper look.

# TEXT 8

*Ecclesiastes 8:1*

מִי כְהֶחֱכָם וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ פֶּשֶׁר דְּבַר חֲכָמַת אָדָם תֵּאִיר פָּנָיו וְעַז פָּנָיו יִשְׁנָא.

Who is like the wise person, and who knows the meaning of a thing? A person's wisdom makes their face shine, and the boldness of their face is changed.

## QUESTION

Why did it take a miracle for Isaac to look like his father?  
Don't children naturally look like their parents?

## ANSWER

Abraham and Isaac naturally did not look alike due to their divergent souls. It took a miracle to change that- G-d changed Isaac's spiritual disposition, which then caused His outward appearance to change as a result.

## QUESTION

Why didn't G-d make Abraham look like Isaac? This option would also work to convince the naysayers that they were related.

## ANSWER

The reason why G-d chose to change Yitzchak's face to look like Avraham's and not the other way around is because when there's a question between a generous or disciplined approach, the former is always the better choice.

## QUESTION

Ishmael displayed negative generosity. Does that mean Avraham's path of generosity is wrong? Is Yitzchak right and his father wrong? Who should we try to emulate when channeling our own personalities?

## ANSWER

Both paths are correct when channeled properly. When channeling our own personalities, each person is encouraged to work with and within the personality type given to them by G-d.

# TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 20, p. 105*

וואס די הוראה דערפון לכל אחד ואחד איז  
בשעת מען האט פאר זיך אם עבודה וואס קען געטאן ווערן אים איינעם  
פון די צוויי קוין—קו החסד אדער קו הגבורה—און ס'איז  
א ספק וועלכע פון זיי צו אויסקלייבן, דארף מען בוחר זיין דעם קו  
החסד.

The message for all of us is clear:

There are certain situations when either approach is valid, either with generosity or restraint. When in doubt as to which one to choose, we should always choose generosity.



# TEXT 10

*Mishnah, Avot 1:12*

הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידיו של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את  
הבריות. ומקרבן לתורה

Hillel said, “Be a student of Aaron. Love peace, pursue peace, love all  
creatures, and bring them closer to the Torah.”

# TEXT 11

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of  
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei  
Amarim, ch. 32*

לומר שאף הרחוקים מתורת ה' ועבודתו, ולכן נקראים בשם בריות בעלמא, צריך  
למשכן בחבלי עבותות אהבה. וכולי האי ואולי יוכל לקרבן לתורה ועבודת ה', והן  
לא לא הפסיד שכר מצות אהבת ריעים

Hillel speaks of those who are distant from G-d and from following His ways, which is why they merit the derogatory title of simple “creatures.” And yet, we must pull them with thick ropes of love. Perhaps, just maybe, we can succeed in bringing them closer to G-d and following His ways. Regardless, we won’t lose, as we will have fulfilled the mitzvah of loving another Jew.

When in doubt,  
choose *Chesed*.



## KEY POINTS

1. Though they were father and son, Abraham and Isaac didn't naturally look alike. It took a miracle to change that.
2. Kabbalah speaks of several cognitive and emotional attributes. In the latter, the primary two traits are called *Chesed* and *Gevurah*, generosity and restraint.
3. Abraham and Isaac were two archetypes of these two traits, Abraham the paragon of generosity, Isaac the paragon of restraint.
4. Neither trait is good in its extreme; rather, they should be tempered with one another.
5. That said, each person is encouraged to work with and within the personality type they possess.

## KEY POINTS

6. These traits are coded in each person's soul.
7. The soul traits stem from a mirror image on High, in G-d Himself. For example, a human tendency for generosity is due to a soul rooted in G-d's tendency for kindness.
8. These tendencies impact how a person thinks, and even how they look.
9. Thus, Abraham and Isaac naturally did not look alike due to their divergent souls. It took a miracle to change that: G-d changed Isaac's very disposition.
10. The reason why G-d changed Isaac to appear like his father and not the other way around is because when faced with either option, it's best to always choose the side of Chesed.

