

# INSIGHTS

*Into The Weekly Parsha*

ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF HARAV YOCHANAN ZWEIG BY RABBI MORDECHAI SHIFMAN

PARSHAS ZOS HABRACHA/SIMCHAS TORAH

## MY SON, THE STRANGER

*"...his brothers he did not give recognition and his children he did not know..." (33:9)*

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos records that Avraham was subjected to ten trials of faith.<sup>1</sup> According to most of the commentaries, the final and most difficult of these trials was the "Akeida", the binding of his son Yitzchak.<sup>2</sup> Avraham was called upon to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice to his Creator. Although his actions reflected a monumental expression of faith, they were not, by any means, unprecedented. Throughout the ages, until present day, many religions have required of its adherents to prove their faith by sacrificing their kin. In this week's parsha we find that the tribe of Levi slaughtered its family members who partook in the sin of the golden calf. What then, is the unequalled feat accomplished by our Patriarch Avraham?

### **Question** *of the week*

**In Vayikra, Rashi explains that celebrating the holiday of Shemini Atzeres is akin to a king who makes a feast for his children for seven days, and then pleads with them to remain for an extra day. Similarly, Hashem requests that Bnei Yisroel remain with Him for an extra day. The implication is that Hashem is the host and we are His guests. However, in Bamidbar, Rashi explains that on Shemini Atzeres Hashem says to Bnei Yisroel, "Please make for me a small feast so that I can enjoy your company." Here, the implication is that we are the hosts and Hashem is our guest. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction?**

Analyzing the juxtaposition of the verses in this week's parsha sheds light upon the aforementioned question. The verse states that Levi showed no favoritism to his father and mother, no recognition of his brothers and did not know who his children were. Rashi explains that this refers to the response shown by the tribe of Levi when Moshe summoned assistance to eradicate those individuals who worshipped the golden calf; without regard to family ties, the tribe of Levi slew the idolaters.<sup>3</sup> The verse then states that Levi preserved Hashem's covenant.<sup>4</sup> Rashi explains that this is a reference to "Bris Milah" - "circumcision".<sup>5</sup> The Talmud teaches that for the entire duration of their stay in the desert, Bnei Yisroel abstained from performing circumcision for they feared that the climatic conditions in the desert would not allow the wounds to heal.<sup>5</sup> The only tribe that continued to circumcise their children was the Levites. Hence, they preserved the covenant. The verse immediately following begins "Yoru mishpatecha l'Yaakov" - "They shall be the teachers of the Law and dispensers of justice to Yaakov".<sup>6</sup> Rashi comments "for they have shown their worthiness".<sup>7</sup> What is the connection between the three above-mentioned concepts, Levi's actions after the golden calf, their commitment to circumcise their children and their becoming teachers and judges?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that by displaying steadfastness and objectivity in the performance of their duty without bias, they proved that they were worthy of being the teachers and judges of Bnei Yisroel.<sup>8</sup> The Torah is praising Levi for their ability to disconnect themselves from those emotional frailties which blur an individual's ability to make dispassionate and impartial decisions. It is this same quality which allowed them to overcome the natural fear that a parent may have when a child undergoes circumcision. By emotionally detaching themselves from their children they were able to behave in a manner which would otherwise have been impossible for a parent. This is the psychological technique employed by those adherents to *other* religions when sacrificing their children.

The Torah stresses that when Avraham was called upon to sacrifice his child, his compliance was not accompanied by any indication of his severing that relationship; on the contrary, he professed his great love for Yitzchak.<sup>9</sup> The greatness of our Patriarch is manifest in his ability to perform an act which contravened the very nature of a parent-child relationship, without emotionally detaching himself from his son. The ability to fulfill the wishes of his Creator without conflict is what make Avraham's actions unparalleled.

1.Avos 5:3 2.Avos D'Rav Nosson 33, Rashi, Rabbeinu Yonah et al. 3.33:9 4.Ibid. 5.Yevamos 63a 6.33:10 7.Ibid. 8.33:9 9.Bereishis 22:2 See Rashi

# DANCING WITH THE BRIDE

*“The Torah that Moshe commanded us is a heritage to the Congregation of Jacob” (33:4)*

Simchas Torah is a day in which we celebrate the Torah. Why did Chazal see fit to designate a separate day for Simchas Torah? Would not Shavuot, the day we received the Torah, be a more appropriate time for this celebration?<sup>1</sup>

The Talmud instructs a father that as soon as his child is able to speak, he should teach him. “Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morasha Kehilas Yaakov” - “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is a heritage to the Congregation of Jacob.”<sup>2</sup> Why is this the verse selected when there are earlier verses in the Torah which convey a similar message, such as “vezos Hatorah asher sam Moshe lifnei Bnei Yisroel” - “This is the Torah that Moshe placed before Bnei Yisroel”<sup>3</sup>?

The last four parshios in the Torah record the events that transpired on the day of Moshe’s death. A major event which ensues is the new covenant in Parshas Nitzavim. The concept of “kol Yisrael araeivim zeh bazeh” - “each Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew” in regard to mitzvos and aveiros, is introduced as a result of our responsibility to the covenant.<sup>4</sup> The general concept of a guarantor is discussed by the Talmud. The Talmud teaches that one who accepts upon himself to repay a loan should the borrower default, is required by Torah law to honor his commitment to pay.<sup>5</sup>

The commentaries raise the following difficulty: Legally, for a person to be liable to perform a service, there must be consideration, such as money. What is the instrument which obligates a guarantor to honor his commitment? The Ritva answers that although the guarantor does not receive money, nevertheless he receives the satisfaction that the lender is relying upon his credibility to issue the loan. This benefit serves as the instrument for the transaction in lieu of money.<sup>6</sup> In light of this explanation, the following difficulty arises: Why are Bnei Yisroel bound to their commitment to be guarantors? What benefit that they do not already have, are they receiving?

To begin answering the aforementioned questions, we must analyze another concept which was introduced on the day of Moshe’s death. This is the concept of “lo bashamayim hee” - “Torah is no longer in the Heavens.”<sup>7</sup> This means that as long as Moshe was alive, he consulted with Hashem concerning all difficult Torah legislation. Since Hashem was the final arbiter for Torah legislation while Moshe was alive, Torah was still in the Heavens. However, on the day of Moshe’s death, Bnei Yisroel was given unilateral authority over all Torah legislation. This is what is meant by “The Torah is no longer in the Heavens.” This new authorization which Bnei Yisroel received was the instrument which obligates them to honor their commitment to be guarantors.

At Sinai, when Bnei Yisroel received the Torah, Chazal describe the relationship formed as that of bride and groom.<sup>8</sup> Hashem was the groom and Bnei Yisroel was the bride. On the day that Moshe died, a new relationship was formed; Bnei Yisroel were the groom and the Torah was the bride. This is alluded to in the verse, “Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morasha Kehilas Yaakov”. In the word “morasha” Chazal see an allusion to the word “me’orasa” - “betrothed”, i.e. the Torah that Moshe commanded us is also betrothed to us.<sup>9</sup> The notions that the Torah is not in the Heavens and that Torah became Bnei Yisroel’s bride are one and the same. The Talmud instructs a father to begin teaching his son Torah with the verse which reflects this new relationship.

Shavuot celebrates Bnei Yisroel becoming a bride to Hashem, while Simchas Torah celebrates Bnei Yisroel becoming betrothed to the Torah. This is reflected in the customs of the day. In most Jewish communities, a representative is chosen to be the “chassan Torah”, the groom to the Torah. Additionally, we dance with the Torah as a groom dances with his bride.

## Quick Halacha

**Before the silent Mussaf prayer for Shemini Atzeres has begun, an announcement should be made reminding the congregation to insert the phrase, “mashiv haru’ach umorid hageshem”. However, if no announcement was made, one should *not* recite this phrase in the silent prayer. The chazzan, however, recites the Geshem benediction in his public repetition even in the absence of an announcement.**

1. See Ramoh Ohrech Chaim 669 for source to Simchas Torah 2. See Tosefes Bracha, Zos Haberacha 3. Vaeschanan 4:44 4. See Rashi 29:28 5. Bava Basra 173b 6. Kidushin 7a 7. 30:12 8. See Rashi VeZos Haberacha 33:2 9. Sanhedrin 59a

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I would like to wish all of you a Ch’siva V’K’sima Tova and a G’mar Tov  
( A Happy and Healthy New Year )