



תולדות
Toldot

Ashreinu אשרינו

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



When Torah and Science Conflict

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Early in our parsha we encounter a bracha given to Yitzchak by Hashem:

וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ,
כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם

“And I will multiply your [descendants] like the stars of the heavens”
(Bereishit 26:4).

This is quite similar to a bracha given two weeks ago in the parsha of Vayeira:

הֲרַבָּה אֲרַבָּה אֶת-זַרְעֲךָ כְּכֹכְבֵי
הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְכַחֵל

“I will greatly multiply your [descendants] as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore”
(Bereishit. 22:17).

To emphasize the importance of this bracha, it is mentioned yet again, in the opening pesukim of Devarim:
“Hashem, your God, has multiplied you, and behold,

וְהִנֵּכֶם הַיּוֹם, כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לְרַב

“You are today as the stars of the heavens in abundance”
(Devarim 1:10).

It is fascinating that Rashi declines to comment on the first two pesukim, as these pose a major problem to the scientists/philosophers of the time. Before Galileo pointed the recently invented telescope up to the night sky in 1609 (more than five hundred years after Rashi wrote his commentaries), no one thought that there existed more than the 3,000–6,000 stars visible to the naked eye. Thus, these brachot seem more like curses... the Jewish nation will only grow as numerous as a few thousand people?!

In addition, there are glaring problems with the second and third quoted pesukim: there are many more than several thousand grains of sand on any given seashore;

and the Torah records that 600,000 adult Jewish males received the Torah on Har Sinai.

Rashi finally comments on Moshe's proclamation that the Jews were as numerous as the stars of the heavens, but not as we would expect. Rashi states:

והלא לא היו אלא שישים רבוא

were [the Jews] not only 600,000?! This is ludicrous! Not only is Rashi implying that there are many more than 600,000 stars in the heavens, but it is such an obvious fact that no sources are quoted!

When I was an undergraduate studying for my degree in astrophysics I performed a quick calculation to find an upper bound on the number of stars in the universe based on the recently released Hubble Ultra Deep Field dataset. I utilized several crude approximations to determine that roughly a maximum of 1021 (1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000) stars existed in the universe at present.

When I was in yeshiva, it was brought to my attention that in Masechet Brachot (32b) the gemara states that Hashem placed 1018 stars when He created the universe. Connecting this back to the second pasuk, estimates of the number of grains of sand on Earth yield roughly 1018 as well! *How did our Sages know?!* The Gemara was compiled roughly 1,500 years before astronomers were able to revolutionize our understanding of the incredible vastness of our cosmos!

Thus, Rashi did not need to comment on the first two pesukim...he was only forced to annotate in the third pasuk that Moshe was being metaphorical.

Richard Feynman, Nobel Laureate and 20th century physics legend, once bluntly wrote that almost every theory of physics ever proposed has been wrong. It has since become widely known in the scientific community that most published papers end up requiring later modifications or their ideas become abandoned by the majority of researchers.

Twenty years ago astronomers were just a year away from discovering the rate of deceleration of the universe. What did they find in 1998? That the universe was not decelerating as predicted, but rather it was accelerating! Not a single astrophysicist predicted

this, as it implies the existence of a fifth fundamental force! Twenty years later the community is still clueless as to what is causing almost everything in the universe to fly apart at an accelerating pace.

The more science progresses, the more we realize what we do not know. But when we look back to our classical Jewish texts, we find again and again that many of the most bizarre findings in science were discussed hundreds to thousands of years prior. For many more examples like this, I highly recommend reading "The Coming Revolution" by Zamir Cohen.

To close on a personal note, I feel blessed to live in an age where science has been progressing so quickly as to help close the gap between our understanding of how the universe works and Torat Emet. May the last unfilled prediction of the Torah come true, speedily in our days.

Keeping it 613

Jordan Landes ('18)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Toldot, Esav claims to Yitzchak that he has the rights to the blessings. His claim was based solely upon being the "older" twin. But Yaakov received this blessing because of his willingness to take it upon himself and dedicate his life to observing Hashem's Torah. The Midrash says that Yaakov's claim was superior to Esav's by 613, representing the 613 mitzvot. In addition, Yitzchak told Esav he would be able to throw off the yoke of Yaakov's rule:

וְהָיָה כְּאִשָּׁר תִּרְיֶד

"when you will be aggrieved" (Bereishit 27:40).

If a time comes when Esav would have the ability to complain that Yaakov was not putting in the effort towards keeping Hashem's Torah, he would have a serious claim to the blessings and no longer be subject to Yaakov's dominance.

Rabbi Dovid Feinstein in his sefer, Kol Dodi, gives an interesting explanation of this situation. The numerical value of וְהָיָה -- aggrieved -- is 614. So, should Esav be aggrieved and be able to give a complaint against Yaakov, he could pursue a claim that exceeds

Yaakov and overcome Yaakov. Our mission in the world as the children of Yisrael is to make sure that time will never come. We should continue to dedicate and find new ways to learn Torah and continue the mission of Yaakov.

Truthful Lie

Kayla Bensmihen ('19)

Yaakov is known to represent the ideals of honesty and truth. However, in this week's parsha we see him lie to his father Yitzchak. Yaakov says,

אָנְכִי עֵשׂוֹ בְּכֹרֶךָ

"It is I, Esav your firstborn" (27:19).

If Yaakov is known for his honesty, then how can he tell such a significant lie?

In reality, there are times in life where we might have to lie to preserve a greater good. For example, if you are ever in a situation where you're being robbed, you can lie and say you have no money on you. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky suggests that this idea applies to the story of Yaakov and Esav. Esav tricked his father into thinking he was a good man. Since Yaakov knew Esav's true character, he wanted to make sure his father's blessing wasn't going to an imposter. Since Esav was a fraud, the bracha technically was never his.

The Michtav M'Eliyahu states that the definition of truth is whatever is good, defined as whatever God wants. While being robbed, the truth is you have money, but the money doesn't belong to the thief. You're "saving the truth" because you aren't giving him what he's trying to wrongfully take.

Awareness

Shaindie Cohen ('19)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Toldot, the classic question arises: was Esav really worthy of a great blessing? Considering that Esav fooled Yitzchak into believing that he was a tzadik, an even greater question is: how could Yitzchak Avinu not realize Yaakov Avinu was a greater tzadik than his twin brother?

The pasuk states,

וְלֹא הִכִּירוּ כִּי הָיוּ יָדָיו יְדֵי עֵשׂוֹ אָחִיו, שְׁעָרָת

"Yitzchak did not recognize (Yaakov's) arms since they were as hairy as his brother Esav's..." (Bereishit 27:23)

which is one answer to our question, that it was as simple as a misconception between the sons.

Reb Noson gives another explanation. Yitzchak was well aware of both of his sons' qualities. Yaakov was the more spiritual and studious type and Esav was the exact opposite. Esav was interested in making his father Yaakov believe that his life goal was to attain *da'at*, meaning God's-consciousness. This caused him to generate a plan to deceive his father. Esav knew that providing his father with food would do just that. Yitzchak Avinu believed that this was his son Esav moving forward in his goal to pursuit *da'at*. As we know, Esav did this to manipulate his father to get the blessing of material wealth. If it wasn't for Rivkah noticing that Esav was a good-for-nothing, his plan would have succeeded. Something we can derive from this is the determination and motivation Yitzchak Avinu had for mankind. He wanted each and every one of us to have the awareness of God's presence and his involvement in our daily lives.

Choose Wisley

Aaron Gross ('20)

This Shabbat we read Parshat Toldot. This parsha features one of the most fascinating stories in the Torah: the sale of Esav's birthright. When Esav returned back from the field and asked for soup, Yaakov replied with a famous proposition:

מִכְרָה כִּיּוֹם אֶת-בְּכֹרְתִךָ, לִי

"Sell to me your birthright" (Bereishit 25:31).

Instead of feeding his tired brother, Yaakov demands Esav's birthright in exchange for food. The pasuk uses the word "today" to indicate Yaakov's urgency to complete the transaction. Yaakov understood his brother's nature and felt responsible to prevent Esav from having claim to the *bechora*.

This transaction seems rather odd. In his sefer Nachalat Tzvi, Rabbi Tzvi Heschel Gross uses the transaction between Avraham and Efron in Parshat

Chayei Sarah to teach the way in which business transactions are typically completed. Usually the buyer remits payment to the seller and the seller in turn then gives the object to the buyer. In Parshat Toldot, Esav agrees to Yaakov's deal even before eating Yaakov's soup in return. Esav was clearly desperate for sustenance, as he says,

וְלָמָּה-זֶּה לִּי, בְּכֹרָה

implying that he is willing and eager to trade his birthright. So why was Esav so eager to rid himself of the *bechora*?

The Rashbam explains that the bechor is the son who acquires a double portion of inheritance from his father. The Ibn Ezra, among others, points out that Yitzchak was poor at the time and that the double portion of inheritance would be extremely minimal. Therefore, Esav was willing to sacrifice it for sustenance after returning from the fields. Only once Yitzchak accumulated great wealth during his time with Avimelech did Esav renew his interest in the birthright.

Rashi stresses a different aspect of the bechora. Rashi explains that originally, prior to *cheit ha'egel*, the *bechorim* were originally supposed to work in the Temple. Esav was not interested in the service of Hashem, due to the restrictions described in Gemara Sanhedrin. Esav is described as “*ayef*,” tired, when he returns from the field, which Rav Soloveitchik explains to mean spiritually tired. Esav placed prime importance on *olam hazeh*, and thought that he would not reap the benefits of the *bechora* in his lifetime. Yaakov, on the other hand, looked forward to his descendants serving Hashem in the Beit Hamikdash.

The story of the sale of the *bechora* teaches us that we each have the ability to choose a path. Esav had easy accessibility to serve Hashem as the bechor, but instead viewed this responsibility as a burden. Yaakov, on the other hand, went to great lengths to have the ability to serve Hashem.

Interestingly, some mefarshim point out that Esav and David Hamelech were similar, both being of red complexion and great warriors. However, Esav used his potential for sin while David channeled his capabilities to serve Hashem and lead the Jewish people. Every person has the potential to use his or her skills, talents, and abilities to serve Hashem through the fulfillment of the mitzvot.



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