

TOLDOS (GENESIS 25:19-28:9)

Like Father, Like Son

2008 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Last week's Torah Portion ended with a record of the genealogy of Abraham's oldest son Ishmael:

These are the descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant, bore to Abraham. These are the names of the sons of Ishmael... (Genesis, 25:12-13)

This week's Portion, logically, continues by telling us the genealogy of Abraham's second son:

And these are the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham... (Ibid, verse 19)

So far, both family trees start off the same. However, the Torah continues with a different statement:

...Abraham was the father of Isaac. (Ibid)

The commentaries are bothered by this apparently redundant statement. *And these are the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac.* Didn't we just read that he is Isaac, son of Abraham? Why is there a need to follow up by telling us that Abraham was the father of Isaac?

Many of the commentaries quote from the Talmud that this was a response to the cynics of that generation. Abraham had been married to Sarah for decades without children. Then she was abducted for a short time by Abimelech, the Philistine king. A short time later, Sarah was pregnant. It didn't take much for the "Yentahs" in the neighborhood to start spreading nasty rumors as to the paternity of Isaac.

In order to stop the rumors, G-d formed Isaac's features to look exactly like Abraham's. Anyone looking at Isaac would see that he was a dead ringer for his father. Hence, *these are the descendants of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac.* The Torah clarifies, unequivocally, that Isaac was the son of Abraham.

Rabbi Avraham Saba, the author of Tzror Hamor, expands on this idea. The Torah is listing the descendants of Isaac. It is telling us his genealogy, his future. The Torah is interested in more than just giving us a list of people who carried his DNA. It wants to tell us what Isaac, son of Abraham was about. Isaac's life was dedicated to the concept of *Abraham was the father of Isaac*. Everything Isaac did in his life was dedicated to that goal. His actions and philosophies indicated to all who met him that *Abraham was the father of Isaac*. According to the Tzror Hamor, this is part of the reason that G-d made Isaac's appearance the same as his father's.

(We find a similar idea in reference to Noah:

These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man...Noah had three sons: Sham, Ham, and Japheth. (Ibid, 6:9-10)

Again, we see the same idea. The first item on the list of Noah's life is the fact that he was righteous. What does his righteousness have to do with his descendants? Everything. Had Father Noah not been the righteous man that he was, I wouldn't be here to write this, and you wouldn't be here to read it!)

I recently heard a dismaying statistic. It seems that Jews are the largest NON-RELIGIOUS ethnic group in the United States. While I couldn't find a source for that statistic, consider the following information from a 2001 survey, quoted from an atheist website:

There are about 5.3 million Jews in America, with only 2.83 million saying that they are believers in the Jewish faith. A full 1.08 million were "adherents of no religion," and 1.36 million identified as Jews embraced a faith other than Judaism.

Have you ever noticed when you read about advocates of so-called "rights" that the Torah opposes, e.g., "gay" marriage, murder of pre-born humans, etc. the lists invariable contain Jewish names? In fact I have often seen these "rights" referred to as "Jewish values."

Now that we are in the post-Thanksgiving season, we are once again being bombarded with music, decorations, and parties in celebration of the birthday of a Jew who advocated ignoring the commandments of the Torah. How many of our fellow Jews will join in celebration?

Do we "look like Abraham?" Do we show, in our every action and deed, that we are not interested in getting absorbed into the prominent culture around us? Or do we just smile, and share the joy over the fact that "'tis the season...?"

Being a biological descendant of Abraham does not make one a "son of Abraham." Abraham had eight sons. Yet G-d chose only Isaac. Isaac had two sons. Yet, G-d chose only Jacob.

No, we don't need to grow long beards and payos and put on Jewish looking garb. (Although that would not be a terrible thing either!!) But we do need to remember who we are. Celebrating "our own December holiday" as our version of the other one doesn't make the situation any better.

Celebrities of the Jewish faith tend to engender Jewish pride. Whether they are politicians, movie stars, or athletes, we tend to enjoy the fact that one of our own has made it.

Personally, despite being a Red Sox fan, I'd rather see the Bosox lose every Friday night and Saturday game, and know that Kevin Youkilis is spending a quiet Shabbos with his family. Someone I know recently pointed out that when our enemies claim that Hollywood is run by Jews who have corrupted the morals of American society, **THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT!**

I take no pride in public figures who happen to be Jewish but represent lifestyles and philosophies that are an anathema to what the Torah teaches us. On the other hand, Jews like Senator Joseph Lieberman (See "Way to go, Joe") and Michael Medved, whether or not you agree with their respective political views, are people who demonstrate to the world that being a son of Abraham means more than eating bagels.

Perhaps we can all learn a lesson from Jonah. He tried to run away from an assignment given to him by G-d. But G-d caught up with him. When the ship he was on was about to sink, the sailors asked him who he was, where he was from, and what he did for a living.

Jonah gave them an answer that we should carry with us every moment of every day of our lives:

"I am a Hebrew. And I fear the G-d of the Heavens..." (Jonah, 1:9)

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

© 2008 Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz. Reprint permitted for non-commercial use with attribution to torahtalk.org.