

PARASHAT TOLDOT



הבורא והמשגיח

The Creator and the Supervisor

■ How Avraham Kept the Torah

Each of our Patriarchs – Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – was charged with a unique mission in the world. Understanding this concept will help us uncover the depths of some of our Sages' teachings that appear to fly in the face of both the Torah and simple logic.

Parashat Toldot begins with another famine, and Yitzchak Avinu, like his father Avraham before him, was preparing to go down to Egypt to find food – but this time, Hashem appears to Yitzchak and stops his plan: *“Do not descend to Egypt... Live in this Land and I will be with you and I will bless you...”* (B'reshit 26,2-3)

Hashem does not explain why He does not want Yitzchak to leave the Land – but He does promise him His Divine blessing in the merit of his father Avraham. Hashem lists Avraham's tremendous merits:

עֲקֵב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֲבִרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרָתִי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקֹּתַי וְתוֹרָתִי.

Because Avraham listened to Me, keeping My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Torahs [laws].” (verse 5)

To what extent did Avraham Avinu observe the Torah? From one word in the above verse, our Sages of blessed memory derived that he kept even the Oral Torah:

Rav Ashi said: Avraham kept even the Rabbinic law of *Eruv Tavshilin*, as is written: “[He kept] My Torahs” – both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

This is certainly most difficult to understand: How can Avraham have observed laws that the Sages would only enact more than 1,500 years later? Let us consult the enlightening commentary of Rabbeinu Avraham, son of the Rambam. On the verse describing how Yaakov Avinu rids his camp of idols and buries them under a tree (B'reshit 35,4), he writes:

“...The mitzvah acts that the Patriarchs performed were [not necessarily the actual mitzvot as we know them, but were rather] *in accord* with the Torah’s commandments, their belief in the Oneness of the Creator, their distancing of polytheism [e.g., their nullification of idol worship], and their service, awe and love [of G-d], which are the fundamental beliefs of the Torah and its roots – and this is why our Sages said that the Patriarchs observed the entire Torah. The intention is not that they observed the Sabbath or ate matzah on Pesach, as might be thought.”

This approach will illuminate our way as we analyze the principles on which the Sages grounded the law of *Eruv Tavshilin*, and as we see how Avraham Avinu maintained these principles.

■ Sabbath and Festivals

We are permitted to cook on Yom Tov for festival eating – but not if Yom Tov falls on Friday, and we wish to cook for the Sabbath. Why not?

The Torah tells us to *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy* (Sh'mot 20,8), teaching us that the Sabbath requires constant remembrance. However, when Yom Tov comes just before the Sabbath, the holiday preparations are liable to take over our thoughts and deeds, and Sabbath might be forgotten. Therefore, as the Sages derive, “*Remember it* in the face of something else that might cause it to be forgotten.” This is why they required us to prepare, on the day before Yom Tov, two cooked foods for the upcoming Sabbath. By doing so, we show that we remember the Sabbath even on the eve of the holiday. These foods are called *Eruv Tavshilin*, and when one has prepared them, he may cook and prepare other foods on the festival for the Sabbath. The end result will then be that there will be two special meals, one for Yom Tov and one for Shabbat, and the honor of both will be maintained. As Rava says in the Gemara, it is “so that one will choose a nice portion for Shabbat, and a nice portion for Yom Tov.” (Betzah 15b)

The idea behind Rava’s words is much deeper and profound than merely showing honor to the holy days. Rather, he wishes to emphasize two different and distinct essences: Shabbat stands for and teaches one type of idea, and Yom Tov teaches a different one.

The Sabbath, the day on which G-d rested from His Creation of the world, attests to the fact that **He is the Creator**: “*For in six days G-d made the Heavens and Earth, and on the seventh day, He rested and withdrew*”

(Sh'mot 31,17). Whoever observes the Sabbath provides a living testimonial to the fact of **the Creation of the world**. This is the day that Hashem set for this purpose from the time of Creation; in no constellation can it ever be changed to a different day. The first public indication of the nature of Shabbat was the Manna, that miraculous food that fell from the sky for the Children of Israel during their forty years of desert wandering. G-d provided the Manna each and every day – but each week on the Sabbath day, He brought it to an absolute halt, providing instead a double portion on Friday, in preparation for the Sabbath.

Yom Tov, on the other hand, represents a different aspect of G-d's dominion over the world. It stands for **His constant supervision and Providence** in the world, and His intervention in the laws of nature. There is no greater manifestation of G-d's providence than His extrication of an entire nation of slaves, Israel, from the clutches of the superpower Egypt, amidst an unprecedented series of miracles. The three festivals – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot – were instituted on the backdrop of the miraculous Exodus and the Divine providence it manifests. As we repeat often during the festival Kiddush: זכר ליציאת מצרים, “in commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt.”

Before the Exodus, Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon: “*that the month of Nissan*” will be the first month for you (Sh'mot 12,2). He was telling them that they will be partners with Him in determining the date of the beginning of the first month, and of each month thereafter, and consequently, the dates of all the holidays. That is, the Beit Din rabbinical court will be authorized to postpone the proclamation of a new month by one day, if necessary, and thus to change the holiday dates.

We see that while the Sabbath is eternally set for the seventh day of the week, the festivals can be shifted in accordance with the Beit Din's determinations. How nicely this corresponds with the fact that Sabbath stands for G-d's one-time Creation and Yom Tov stands for G-d's constant intervention in the world. The mitzvah of *Eruv Tavshilin* teaches us that each of them must retain the proper importance it deserves, and must not be mixed together.

■ Proclaiming G-d's Name

The Torah portions that precede Toldot tell us of Avraham Avinu's mission to proclaim the name of G-d wherever he went, and especially in Eretz Yisrael. His mission is to teach the world that G-d is the One and Only, that He created the world, and that He continues to intervene in nature when necessary. As written:

...וַיִּבֶן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה'.

*...He built there an altar to G-d,
and proclaimed the Name of G-d.* (B'reshit 12,8)

For instance, after the first world war - the Four Kings Against the Five - Avraham meets with the King of S'dom and tells him about G-d, *“the most high L-rd, master of heaven and earth.”* (14,22)

But the message also took on a deeper level, as we see after he was forced to leave the Promised Land for Egypt because of the famine. Avraham's arrival in Egypt, a most significant event in his life, was quite risky for him and his wife Sarah. In fact, only G-d's active intervention saved them from the evil designs of King Pharaoh: *“Hashem brought great plagues upon Pharaoh and his household regarding the matter of Sarai, Avram's wife.”* (12,17)

Therefore, when Avraham returned to the Land of Israel with all the *“livestock and silver and gold”* (13,2) with which Pharaoh had sent him, he was thus able to show the world that Hashem not only created the world and the laws of nature, but continues to act within them. G-d has not abandoned the world to its own devices, but rather supervises over all that happens, protects those who love and fear Him, and even changes the laws of nature for them when necessary.

This message is relevant to that which will happen hundreds of years later in Egypt, when G-d brought about great plagues and miracles to save Avraham's descendants from the hands of King Pharaoh and force him to send them out to freedom.

■ Like Fathers, Like Sons

Ramban (Nachmanides, d. 1270), one of the most revered Torah scholars of the Rishonim period, emphasizes this point in his commentary to the Torah (B'reshit 12,6). The concept is referred to as *מעשה אבות סימן לבנים*, *maaseh avot siman labanim*, and means that the actions of our holy Forefathers pave the way for, and are often copied by, their descendants after them.

Consider Avraham Avinu, whose life represents the basis for what is to occur in the future to his descendants. Via his actions and experiences, Avraham laid the foundations upon which the Nation of Israel was molded. We can therefore say: Just as Avraham spread to the world two fundamental aspects of the Name of G-d, so too, the Children of Israel were commanded to commemorate these two aspects, via the Sabbath and the Festivals. Specifically, Avraham taught the world that:

1. There is One Creator of the world: Hashem, the Supreme G-d.
2. Hashem has not abandoned His world, but rather continues to supervise and lead it, intervening when necessary, even if it requires modifying natural law.

As we saw, these two fundamentals are precisely that which we learn from the twin mitzvot of Shabbat and Yom Tov:

1. Shabbat declares the Creation of the world.
2. The Three Festivals – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot – were founded upon the Exodus from Egypt, and proclaim Hashem’s continued supervision and protection of Israel.

Avraham Avinu knew the secret of distinguishing between the holiness of the Sabbath and the holiness of the Festivals – precisely the principle that stands behind the Rabbinic mitzvah of *Eruv Tavshilin*. Both the Sabbath and the Festivals must be honored, separately, on their own merits. We thus see the truth of Rav Ashi’s teaching that Avraham fulfilled this commandment, even though it had not yet been formally instituted!

■ Before and After

We can now answer a question that arises when we read Parashat Lekh Lekha. Before Avraham went down to Egypt, he proclaimed G-d’s Name in the area near Beit El, as we saw above: “*He built there an altar to Hashem and proclaimed the Name of G-d*” (B’reshit 12,8). Why, then, in the next chapter, right after he returned from Egypt, did he do the same thing again, in the same place? As written:

וַיֵּלֶךְ לְמִסְעָיו... אֶל מְקוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה שָׁם בְּרֵאשִׁית וַיִּקְרָא שָׁם אֲבָרָם בְּשֵׁם ה'.

*He went on his travels from the Negev to Beit El,
to the place where his tent was at first,
and he proclaimed there the Name of G-d.* (13,3-4)

It could be, of course, that while Avraham was away in Egypt, the Canaanites again defiled these areas with their pagan practices, requiring a re-sanctification. But in light of what we have learned above, we can provide a deeper explanation: Before he went down to Egypt, his proclamation to the world was that G-d is the Creator; after he returned from Egypt, he added to his message the fact that G-d continues to supervise the world.

Evidence of this is found in that which the Torah tells us after Avraham made a treaty with King Avimelekh of the Plishtim: “*Avraham planted a tree in Be’er Sheva, and proclaimed there the Havayah name, L-rd of the*

world" (21,33). We see that he instilled the idol-worshippers with the sense that G-d is the Master and Creator of the entire world, as indicated by the *Havayah* name, Who supervises and leads His world.

■ **Yitzchak, Do Not Descend to Egypt**

Let us now return to the passage with which we began and explain it anew: *"There was a famine in the land... G-d [told] Yitzchak, 'Do not descend to Egypt... Live in this Land and I will be with you... for Avraham listened to Me, keeping My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My Torahs.'"* (B'reshit 26,1-5)

Avraham's mission was to publicize the Name of G-d, Who is both Creator and Active Supervisor. He did this perfectly, as G-d tells Yitzchak above – and this is precisely the reason why Yitzchak may not go to Egypt: it would be redundant! Hashem is telling Yitzchak, "Your father Avraham has already proclaimed the dual principle of G-d the Creator and G-d the Active Supervisor; he has already laid the groundwork for Israel's descent to Egypt, and its salvation from there via great miracles and with much riches. Thus, there is no need for you to do the same thing. Your mission will be different."

What will it be? Yitzchak's task will be to teach that G-d dwells in the Land of Israel and blesses it miraculously at times of trouble. He experienced this himself:

וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּמְצָא בְּשָׁנָה הַהוּא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ ה'.

Yitzchak planted in that land, and reaped that year 100 times as much as he sowed; G-d blessed him. (verse 12)

The fact that Yitzchak's plot alone was blessed attests that Hashem, the G-d of Yitzchak, is He Who stands behind this miracle. King Avimelekh of Gerar and his Chief of Staff Pichol recognized this, saying, *"We have indeed seen that G-d has been with you."* (verse 28)

Avraham was charged with the mission of conquering Eretz Yisrael; קוּם וְהָלַךְ בְּאֶרֶץ הַתְּהוֹמֹת, *"Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the Land, for to you I will give it"* (13,17) – but Yitzchak has a different task: גּוּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, *"Dwell in this land!"* (26,3)

Yitzchak's mission is to hold fast to the Land of Israel, to settle it even during times of famine and other troubles, and even when faced with war with the Plishtim. His task is to teach the world that the Nation of Israel must hold

on to its Land even in the face of great difficulties against its enemies. G-d's message to Yitzchak is this: "Just as I am with you when you face troubles, and just as I come to your rescue when you face suffering, so too, I will be with Am Yisrael during its time of tribulation in the Land of Israel and save it from its enemies."

As opposed to both Avraham and Yitzchak, the job of Yaakov Avinu was to build the infrastructures of the Nation of Israel:

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי אֶל שְׂדֵי פְרִיה וּרְבֶהָ...
*G-d said to him: I am the L-rd Shad-dai,
 be fruitful and multiply... (35,11)*

This is not merely a blessing, but a clear Divine command to reach the number of 70 descendants before they are to get to Egypt. G-d singles out His name upon Yaakov, who is called Israel and who represents the future Nation of Israel. This is why Yaakov proclaims G-d's name in the following manner:

וַיִּצַב שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לוֹ אֶל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
He erected an altar there, and called it 'G-d is Israel's G-d.' (33,20)

We have thus seen that each one of the Patriarchs had a unique mission, which they fulfilled to perfection. It is this that merited them an exalted position for all generations, as G-d told Moshe at the Burning Bush:

כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
 שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי לְדֹר דֹּר.
*Say to the Children of Israel: 'Hashem - the G-d of your fathers
 and the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of
 Yaakov – has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this
 is My remembrance for every generation.'* (Sh'mot 3,15)

