

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

The first pasuk in the parsha reads: "And Yaakov dwelled in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan." Yaakov's domicile is described in a two-fold manner: M'GUREI AVIV - his father's sojourning, and Eretz Canaan.

With his return to the Holy Land a major chapter in Yaakov's life has finally come full circle: Yaakov is no longer in exile, he is back living with his father once again, and can fulfill both the mitzva of Kibud Av VaEim as well as that of living in Eretz Canaan, the chosen, promised land. This blessed turn of events is augmented by Eisav's welcome departure from the scene, as Eisav's move to Har Se'ir perforce puts an end to his own fulfillment of both of these mitzvot.

Having mentioned Yaakov's father (Megurei Aviv) the parsha's second verse begins to retell the next major chapter of Yaakov's life story as our focus moves over to the next generation - to Yaakov's own offspring.

The Torah's words - Eileh Toldot Yaakov - usually precede a fully detailed chronicle of a person's family tree, and hence we expect these words to be followed by an enumeration of all the children of Yaakov. This, however, is not the case and the Torah - mirroring Yaakov's own behavior - shines the spotlight entirely upon Yosef, to the exclusion of all the others.

Rabbeinu B'Chayei writes that Yosef managed to exhibit the positive attributes

of each of his brothers (i.e. Yehuda's royal prerogatives were later clearly evident as it says (B'reishit 42:6) Yosef was the one who ruled the earth, Levi's prophetic qualities resided in Yosef as evidenced by his ability to interpret dreams etc.) Seeing as his qualities far outshone that of his brothers, the rights of the first born which should have naturally gone to Reuven were transferred over to Yosef and he became his father's chosen son. The Midrash (Midrash Rabba 84:6-8) points to the myriad parallels which are evident in the comparison of the lives of Yaakov and Yosef declaring that whatever happened to the Father also happened to the son.

Just as Yaakov's own mother Rivka had been barren for many years, so too, Yosef was born to Rachel after many long years of waiting. Yaakov's brother Eisav hated him, and planned to bring about his death, just as Yosef's brothers detested him. Both were separated for years from their father, married and had their children born far away in the Diaspora. Both struggled at first, eventually succeeding to overcome adversity achieving financial success.

This similarity between father and son is alluded to in the verse wherein Yaakov is likened to a fire and Yosef to a flame: "The house of Yaakov will be fire, the house of Yosef will be flame" (Ovadia 1:18). Building on the words of the Midrash (quoted by Rashi on the parsha's first verse), Rav Amital explained that Yaakov and Yosef each represent two different models of how a Jew can engage with an alien society and culture, and manage to emerge morally and spiritually unscathed. Yaakov strived to keep himself apart, withdrawing from

outside influences, while Yosef lived amongst, and fully interacted with, the upper echelons of the contemporary Egyptian society. Although Yosef's children were born and bred amidst a foreign Egyptian society, they were taught how to stand apart when necessary in order to nurture their own tradition. Thus, to this day we bless our children in the Birkat Habanim, to grow up to be like Ephraim and Menashe.

Yosef was Yaakov's "clone" in an additional sense as well. Not only did he share many central life experiences and personality traits with his father, but in their physical likeness Yosef and Yaakov could have easily been mistaken for one another. This is beautifully illustrated in the Talmud's depiction of how Yosef was saved from having nearly succumbed to Potiphar's wife. Yosef attracted Potiphar's wife's attention. After her earlier attempts to seduce Yosef had failed, she devised a plan. Feigning illness on a heathen holiday, she told her husband that she would stay at home while the rest of the household participated in the Avoda Zara ceremony. Thus she finally succeeded to be alone with Yosef who felt his willpower waning. Chazal tell us that Yaakov was about to give in to her advances when he suddenly saw the image of his father in the window. At that moment Yosef gathered his resolve and fled out of the house, (Masechet Sotah 36b). How did Yaakov's image miraculously appear in the window? The possible answer is that seeing as Yaakov and Yosef so closely resembled one another, Yosef saw his own image reflected in the window pane whereupon he felt that he was staring at his father,

(Yefeh Mar'eh Horayot 10b). This instantly reminded him of his moral upbringing and of his spiritual destiny, and as a result he fled the scene of the potential crime.

Ma'aseh Avot Siman L'banim: We too are fashioned in the image of our forefathers, and are destined to repeat the Biblical stories throughout history. Those who reside in the Diaspora today are constantly seduced by western values and mores. It is time we remember our true inner self - our true calling and destiny - and resolve to follow in the footsteps of the Avot; It is time to return home to the land of our fathers "Eretz Megurei Aviv" - Eretz Yisrael!

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