



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN

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Every Friday, I have the privilege of broadcasting a radio show together with Rav Shmuel Eliyahu, Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, on Radio Galei Yisrael. Listeners call up to ask Rav Eliyahu about all kinds of *halachic* questions. One particular topic comes up almost every single week: names. Parents ask if this is an appropriate name, or how to deal with competing interests in naming a child, or looking for a deeper meaning in a name. Why? Because they know that a name is an identity, it helps form a personality, it means something, and parents hope that the name that they pick will be a blessing and bring success to their son or daughter.

This week's *parsha* tells us how Avraham and Sarah named their own son. At long last, with Avraham at 100 years old, and Sarah at 90, they were able to name their newborn child, and they chose the name Yitzchak. The Torah gives us Sarah's words: "God has made laughter (*tzechok*) for me; whoever hears will laugh (*yitzachak*) with me (Bereishit 21:6).

A thought that came to me last year when preparing my *drasha* for when I was going

to speak to the wonderful *kehilla* at Mishkan Avraham is that if Avraham had been reading a book when he was told he would have a son, would he have named the baby Reading a Book? If Sarah had been walking, would they have named him Walk? So Sarah laughed. Why is that reason enough to name the baby Yitzchak?

I think about this question because my own Hebrew name is Avraham Yitzchak. Why did Avraham give his son the name Yitzchak, a name that has gone down from generation to generation, to my great-grandfather Avraham Yitzchak, and from him to me? What is so special about this word, Yitzchak?

To answer that, we have to ask ourselves what makes people laugh in the first place. My wife and I are very lucky to have a number of children who are really very funny. We can sit at the Shabbat table, and there is literally endless laughter and joking, because, *Baruch Hashem*, each one of them has a very unique way of thinking. They bring that uniqueness to the many great things they do in life. And so I have the ability, every week, to consider the philosophy of humor. What makes a great joke? Why do we laugh?

The answer is that it is something we did not expect. When the joke subverts expectations, when my son gets up and says something unexpected or surprising, we all laugh. That's what's funny about it. For that reason, the joke is never as funny the second time you hear it as the first. Clearly,



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there is something about the element of surprise that makes something funny.

Avraham and Sarah knew that Yitzchak meant something to the future of the Jewish people. Avraham had been promised this son that would continue his spiritual legacy. If so, they must have known that their descendants from this child that carry that legacy would never follow the normal courses of history. This would be a nation that would outlast every superpower and survive exile and dispersion. This nation would surprise the world, over and over again, because *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* promised Avraham so.

Perhaps this is the reason they named Yitzchak after laughter - because they knew that the Jewish people would surprise the world, over and over again, and thereby make them laugh.

The world expected that after the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, with exile not just once but twice, and after *Klal Yisrael* was dispersed around the world and spoke other languages, the Hebrew language would disappear and the Jewish people would completely assimilate. The world expected that after the pogroms, Jews would be afraid to get married, afraid to make *smachot*, and afraid to go to *shul*. After every kind of inquisition, massacre, and expulsion in our history, anyone would have said that there was no chance for the Jewish people to survive.

But we bring the surprise factor. After every pogrom, after every *churban*, after even the murder of six million in the Holocaust, we rise up with the determination to survive. *Klal Yisrael* continues to surprise the world with its resilience again and again and again.



Who would ever have imagined, 80 years ago, when the Jewish people were walking out of the concentration camps, that they would one day have a state of their own? Who would have imagined that the Jewish people would be providing so much technology and science to the world, that we would have a military so powerful and so creative, that we would be selling defense systems to Germany - now a firm ally of the Jewish state? Who would have imagined that the Jewish people would have such a high number of satellites in the world? Who would have imagined that Israel's army and Air Force would be fighting side by side with the American Air Force in attacking Iran, a nation more than ten times our size? Who would have imagined that almost half of the Jewish people would come to live in and build up the Land of Israel, that we would build *shuls*, cities, and communities across the country, and that in 78 years we would have such a flourishing country? That is the surprise we give to the entire world.

This week, we all went through elections, and each of us voted for what we believe is best for the Jewish people. But no matter what, let us remember: we are one nation. We are all the children of Avraham,

Yitzchak, and Yaakov. We have to remember that despite our many different opinions, we continue to surprise the world not because of our separation, but because we are united as one people.

I am writing these words before I know the results, and before I have even gone to vote. But I know in my heart that every Jew standing in line to vote this week is someone I love. That they are part of this amazing nation of *Klal Yisrael*. That we are all going to vote because we love the Jewish nation and want its state ultimately to be a beacon to the entire world. We want to continue surprising the world with inventions in medicine, agriculture, high-tech, and water, and to continue bringing to the world the good that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* wills for this world.

Let us continue being messengers of Hashem, continue loving each other, and continue embracing each other, knowing that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* is with us. And *b'ezrat Hashem*, we will very soon surprise the world with the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*, from which all the nations of the world will benefit.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



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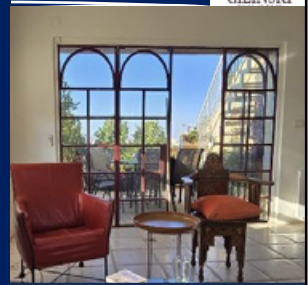


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