

**RABBI SHALOM ROSNER**

Rav Kehilla, Ohel Ephraim in Nofei HaShemesh
Maggid Shiur, Daf Yomi, OU.org
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# *Avraham Holid et Yitzchak:* The Responsibility of Transmission

Yitzchak, of course, remains an important figure in Parashat Toldot. We see him reopening the wells that Avraham had dug and giving them the same names. But in many ways, Yitzchak remains the most mysterious of the Avot. The Torah tells us relatively little about his inner life. And yet the parsha opens with a remarkable description of his birth:

**וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם, אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק**

These are the descendants of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham; Avraham fathered Yitzchak.[1]

The second half of the verse seems almost unnecessary. We already know that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham. Why does the Torah repeat that Avraham fathered Yitzchak?

Rashi offers two explanations. First: אברהם הוליד את יצחק- לאחר שקרא הקדוש ברוך הוא שמו אברהם, אחר כך הוליד את יצחק. The Torah is emphasizing that it was specifically **Avraham**, not Avram, who fathered Yitzchak.

Rashi's second explanation is even more striking. The people of the generation were skeptical about Yitzchak's parentage. They claimed that Yitzchak was actually the son of Avimelech, since Sarah had been taken to Avimelech's palace and had miraculously remained without children until that point. Therefore, Hashem made Yitzchak's appearance unmistakably similar to Avraham's:

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik[2] focuses on a different aspect of the verse, specifically on the word הוליד ( *holid*), fathered.

## HOLID IS MORE THAN GIVING BIRTH

The Rav points out that when the Torah describes the descendants of Yishmael, it uses different language: **וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם, אֲשֶׁר הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחַת שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם.** These are the descendants of Yishmael, the son of Avraham, whom Hagar the Egyptian maidservant of Sarah bore to Avraham.[3] The Torah uses the language of ילד - **yalda**, "she gave birth," when describing Hagar and Yishmael.

But when describing Avraham and Yitzchak, the Torah deliberately says

1. Bereshit 25:19




2. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *Masoret HaRav*
3. Bereshit 25:12

Avraham holid. Et Yitzchak.

Rav Soloveitchik understands this distinction as representing two fundamentally different models of continuity. **Yalda** describes biological continuity. **Holid** describes something much greater: the transmission of an identity, a mission, and a way of life.

Avraham did not merely have Yitzchak. Avraham created Yitzchak. He transmitted to him the covenant that he himself had received. The descendants of Yishmael would multiply, expand, and spread geographically. Their continuity would be largely a natural process of reproduction and expansion. The story of Yitzchak and his descendants, however, is entirely different. Their continuity comes through struggle.

Yitzchak and Rivka have only two children, and even their pregnancy is painful and complicated. Yaakov is forced to leave his home. He spends years away from his family, first in the house of Lavan and later struggling to establish his own family and identity. The covenantal family does not simply grow. It struggles to grow. That is precisely because Jewish continuity is not simply biological. It is educational. It requires effort, sacrifice, and transmission.

## THE ה OF AVRAHAM AND SARAH

Rav Soloveitchik develops this idea further through the addition of the letter ה to the names of Avraham and Sarah. Avram became: אַבְרָהָם and Sarai became: שָׂרָה. The addition of the ה represented a transformation in their identity and mission. They were no longer merely individuals. They became the father and mother of a nation. That transformation changed the meaning of parenthood itself. Prior to the transformation, fatherhood and motherhood are natural, biological institutions. However, once Avraham and Sarah become the parents of the Jewish nation, parenthood acquires another dimension: the responsibility to teach. The Torah's command: "Be fruitful and multiply", does not end with birth. Rather it begins with birth. Having a child is not the completion of the parent's responsibility. It is the beginning of a lifelong responsibility to shape, educate, guide, and transmit.

This is perhaps the meaning of the Torah's description of Avraham: אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק. Avraham didn't merely bring Yitzchak into the world. He brought Avraham's world into Yitzchak. He gave him his values, his faith, his commitment, and his mission.

## JEWISH CONTINUITY IS NOT AUTOMATIC

This distinction helps explain something fundamental about Jewish history. Biological continuity is relatively easy. People have children, and children have children. But Jewish continuity is different. A child does not automatically inherit a commitment to Torah simply because his parents are committed to Torah. The Jewish tradition must be transmitted.

That is why the Rambam, at the beginning of *Hilchot Avodah Zarah*, describes



Avraham's mission not merely as discovering monotheism for himself, but as teaching it to others and creating a community that would continue his beliefs. Avraham discovered Hashem. But he also understood that discovery alone was insufficient. He had to **transmit** that discovery. That transmission reached Yitzchak.

### A LIFELONG RESPONSIBILITY

There is an important lesson here for parents and grandparents. We sometimes think that raising children means providing them with the right opportunities: a good education, a good school, financial security and a stable home. All of those things are important. But the Torah is asking something deeper. What are we transmitting? What part of ourselves will our children carry with them? Will they inherit our love of Torah? Our sensitivity toward other people? Our commitment to chesed? Our integrity? Our relationship with Hashem? Our ability to persevere when life becomes difficult? These things cannot simply be taught in a classroom. They are transmitted through example. That is the meaning of הוליד. It is not enough to bring a child into the world. We have to bring the world of our values into the child. ■





