

# Parsha Ponders

Toldos | November 5, 2021 | 1 Kislev 5782

## *Two perspectives on Yitzchak<sup>1</sup>*

...והיה כאשר תריד ופרקת עולו מעל צוארך

...It shall be, that when the Jews don't keep the Torah<sup>2</sup>, you shall remove his yoke from upon your neck<sup>3</sup>

There's an interesting verse in the book of Isaiah. It says<sup>4</sup>: "You (Hashem) are our Father, since Avraham didn't know us, and Yisrael didn't recognize us. Forever Your name is Hashem, our Father, our Redeemer." What's interesting about this verse is Yitzchak is strangely absent. We also find two different explanations from our Sages to this verse. At first glance, they appear to be total contradictions, one saying the exact opposite of the other. However, if we delve into their proper meaning, it will become clear that they are actually saying the same idea, just from different vantage points.

The first explanation<sup>5</sup> is that our Sages pick up on the fact that Yitzchak is missing from this prophecy. Why is that so? They ask rhetorically that if someone were to decree upon you suffering<sup>6</sup>, would you consider them to be part of the forefathers? Meaning, our *parsha* describes the blessings that Yitzchak gave to Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav's blessing was that if the Jews don't follow the Torah they way they are supposed to, Eisav's descendants will have the right and ability to oppress them. Since it would appear that Yitzchak advised Eisav to oppress the Jews, in the future (the subject of this prophecy), Yitzchak will not be considered part of the forefathers.

However, another explanation<sup>7</sup> sounds like it is saying the opposite about Yitzchak. In the future, the Jews will be guilty of many sins. Hashem will, so-to-speak, consult with the forefathers to see what should be done with the Jews. Both Avraham and Yaakov will say that since the Jews are guilty of their sins, they should be punished accordingly. However, it will be Yitzchak who will defend the Jewish people. He will say, "Are they my children? Are they not Your children?!" He brings a whole case to defend them<sup>8</sup>. Upon hearing this defense, the Jewish people will declare that "You, Yitzchak, alone are our father."

Now, we often find disagreements amongst our Sages in how to interpret the Torah. At the same time, when do we find such stark contrast in interpretation? On the one hand, our Sages are almost reprimanding Yitzchak for sending Eisav against us, ostracizing him from the forefathers, and on the other hand it's as if he is the choicest of the forefathers. What's going on here<sup>9</sup>? In truth, as already stated, these two explanations are two sides of the same coin. They're both examining different aspects of "*Kiddush Hashem*", sanctifying the name of Hashem, as we will explain.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on Emes L'Yaakov to Genesis 27:40

<sup>2</sup> Targum Onkelos, Targum "Yonasan", and Rashi ad. loc., based on Bereishis Rabbah 67:7. It sounds like it was a sure thing that this would happen

<sup>3</sup> Genesis loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 63:16

<sup>5</sup> Bereishis Rabbah loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Lit: שמדים

<sup>7</sup> Shabbos 89b

<sup>8</sup> See other perspectives on this episode in <https://parshaponders.com/vayeitzei-5777> and <https://parshaponders.com/pesach-5780>

<sup>9</sup> See Rada to Bereishis Rabbah loc. cit. who cites the *gemarra* in Shabbos. Perhaps he was also bothered with this *gemarra*

The Rambam codifies<sup>10</sup> that the entire House of Israel are commanded in *Kiddush Hashem*. Two things stand out about this statement of the Rambam. First of all, he stresses “the entire House of Israel”, something we don’t find by other *mitzvos*. Second, why didn’t he say that everyone is *obligated* in *Kiddush Hashem*, like he usually does? Instead, he writes a more passive phrase, that we are *commanded*. We can infer from this that *Kiddush Hashem* is different than all other *mitzvos*. Other *mitzvos* are dependent on a person’s active attempt to fulfill the *mitzvah*. In contrast, with *Kiddush Hashem*, the focus is on the results. The goal is that Hashem’s Name be sanctified in this world.

Our Sages tell us<sup>11</sup> that when it comes to *Chillul Hashem*, the desecration of Hashem’s name, it doesn’t matter whether it was intentional or accidental. We can say all the more so, the same thing is true with *Kiddush Hashem*. Therefore, even if a person didn’t intend at all to sanctify Hashem’s name, or even if they intended to **desecrate** Hashem’s name, but their actions resulted in a *Kiddush Hashem*, then it’s considered that they have fulfilled this *mitzvah*. This is since regardless of their intent, Hashem’s name was sanctified in this world.

With this, we can understand a very astounding statement of our Sages. They teach us<sup>12</sup> that the wicked Sisera, the one from the times of the prophetess Devorah, has descendants who learned Torah in Jerusalem. Regarding Sancheriv, the one who exiled the Ten Tribes, his descendants taught Torah to the masses. Who were they? The famous Sages Shemaya and Avtalyon. Finally, the grandchildren of Haman learned Torah in Benei Brak. This is astonishing. These three gentiles, some of the most wicked in our history, would merit that their descendants would convert to Judaism and learn and teach Torah? How could this be?

What all these three had in common is that, despite their worst intentions, they effected a massive *Kiddush Hashem*. Haman’s decree to exterminate the Jews created one of the largest acts of repentance in our history<sup>13</sup>. The salvation from Sancheriv almost resulted in the coming of Moshiach, had King Chizkiya praised Hashem properly<sup>14</sup>. This almost complete redemption was due to Sancheriv’s war against the Jerusalem. Finally, the famous song of Devorah was composed solely due to the efforts of Sisera to attack the Jewish people. These three and their wicked acts brought about a tremendous sanctification of Hashem’s name. Since this was the result of their actions, they were rewarded with righteous descendants<sup>15</sup>.

With this perspective on *Kiddush Hashem*, we can glean an understanding of Yitzchak’s intent. When Yitzchak gave Yaakov the blessings reserved for the firstborn, Eisav complained that nothing was left for him. Yitzchak advised Eisav to enact decrees of persecution against Yaakov’s descendants. What was his intention? Yitzchak knew with certainty that Yaakov’s descendants would be able to withstand the harsh suffering imposed upon them. He turned out to be correct, and throughout the ages the Jews were victorious against their oppressors. Nevertheless, this advice would prove extremely worthwhile for

---

<sup>10</sup> Mishneh Torah Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:1

<sup>11</sup> Avos 4:4; see also Kiddushin 40a

<sup>12</sup> Sanhedrin 96b

<sup>13</sup> See <https://parshaponders.com/purim-5778> for an approach which says that we try to ensure Haman gets no reward for this *Kiddush Hashem*

<sup>14</sup> See Sanhedrin 94a

<sup>15</sup> This explanation of the *gemarra* was already suggested by the Alter of Kelm, printed in Chochmah UMussar II p. 345

Eisav. This is because these decrees would create many opportunities for a *Kiddush Hashem*. Just like Sisera, Sancheriv, and Haman, Eisav's descendants would receive reward for the *Kiddush Hashem* that they cause.

This advise of Yitzchak caused him, through the lenses of our Sages, to be seen by the Jews in two ways. On the one hand, his advice caused tremendous suffering throughout our history. This pain was all because of Yitzchak. As such, this is why our Sages say that Yitzchak, in a way, lost the right to be considered one of the forefathers. On the other hand, the Sages focus on the amazing *Kiddush Hashem* that Yitzchak's advice brought out into the world. All the reward the Jews accrued is beyond measure. This reward is what in the end will protect the Jews at the end of days. Despite their sins, Hashem will forgive them, due to Yitzchak's advice. This makes him the choicest amongst the forefathers.

Good Shabbos