

וִירָא

Sarah advised her husband to cast out Ishmael, when she saw that he was "Mitzachaik"; and she feared that he would be an evil influence for her son. Yet her son was named "Yitzchok". Both names have a common root, meaning to laugh or to play. What is the difference between "Mitzachaik" and "Yitzchok"?

The difference is, that "Mitzachek" is in the present tense, and "Yitzchok" is in the future tense. She saw that Ishmael's philosophy of life was, getting the most out of life now; with no concern about the future. Such a life can lead only to *שפיכת דמים*, *ג'ע, ער'וי*. For Isaac she sought that which would provide happiness and enjoyment in the future.

How many of our parents, are concerned only that their children be "Mitzachaik". "Let them enjoy life, Rabbi", they say. We must learn to give our child early in life the things that "Yitzchok", he will have something to live for and enjoy later in life.

P.H.S.

וִירָא

LOOK UNTO THYSELF

The Biblical assignment for this Saturday contains the all important account of Abraham's supreme test of loyalty, namely his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac as a demonstration of unlimited faith in G-d. This stirring episode in Abraham's life is introduced in the Torah with the significant words "Lech l'cho". Commenting on these two Hebrew words, the Midrash notes that once before, the command "Lech l'cho" was given to Abraham. "And the Lord said unto Abram: Lech l'cho, Get thee out of the country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's house unto the land that I will show thee." The Midrash proceeds to discuss the relative importance of these two commandments and finally concludes that the Lech l'cho associated with the binding of Isaac is of greater value and of greater importance. (Genesis Rabba 55:8)

On the surface, the above quotation would seem a mere play of words with little spiritual significance. But a closer analysis

will reveal a profound message which is most applicable to present day religious problems and perplexities.

Two great missions were entrusted to Abraham. The first mission was universal in character. Abraham was asked to leave his father's house and go out into the greater world to preach monotheism and to convert the world to this doctrine. The second mission was limited in nature. It involved only two people, father and son. Abraham was bidden to take Isaac to the mountain of Moriah and there teach him unquestioning loyalty to G-d. And yet, according to our sages, the second mission outweighs the first. Why?

Human experience has shown that quite often when people undertake a mission of universal importance, in their zeal to capture the world, they may forget that they and their families are part of it. Thus, in our own country, it is not uncommon to find people who are active in the cause of religion and who are irreligious in their personal lives; people who seek to save Judaism but are unconcerned with their own salvation. In emphasizing the superior importance of Abraham's task to impart religion to his son in preference to the mission of converting the whole world to his ideology, our sages wished to impress upon us the need for self-attention, self-consecration and self-salvation.

If we wish to save Judaism we must start with ourselves. When each one will sincerely be concerned with his own religious improvement and that of his family, Judaism will flourish without any conscious effort on our part to save it.

Rabbi Benjamin Bak

חיי שרה

ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבכתה.

Why didn't Isaac deliver the eulogy? Would it not have been a greater honor that her son would give an appraisal of his mother?

The answer is, that Isaac knew his mother only when she was already in her old age; and he could only offer testimony of her piety when she was old. Only Abraham could testify that she was the same G-d-fearing woman when she was only 20 and even 7. Only Abraham could offer the lesson that a pious woman in old age is only she who has striven for it when she was young.

American youth see our Synagogue only for the super-annuated; and associate piety with old age. Grandmother was sitting constantly with her "Tichinoh". One grandchild said to the other: "Why is grandma always reading that book?" "Well," answered the other, "she is cramming for her finals". We have to teach our young people that the Synagogue is a place for the entire family.

P.H.S.

חיי שרה

(Thanksgiving Day)

ותשא רבקה את עיניה ותרא את יצחק — ראתה ידיו שטוחות בתפלה.

She saw that Isaac was that affluent man, with possessions throughout the land; and yet בתפלה He did not say "כחי ועוצם ידי" but forever was thankful to the Almighty. The greatness of our country is also through "ידיו שטוחות" We are the richest and mightiest in the world, yet we are engaged in prayer and thankfulness to the Almighty.

P.H.S.

חיי שרה

THE ROLE OF THE JEWISH WOMAN

One of the very inspiring thoughts brought to light by the Biblical narratives of our Patriarchs is the important role assigned to women in matters fundamental to the Jewish religion. On two occasions, both involving the religious future of their children, the Torah accepts the judgment of Sarah and Rebecca as more sound and more correct than the judgment of Abraham and Isaac. This is in line with an ancient Rabbinic observation that G-d endowed women with a superior sense of intuitive wisdom.

The determining influence of the Jewish mother in matters of religion receives its fullest expression in the Biblical portion designated for this Sabbath. Abraham, before his death, summoned his faithful servant Eliezer and solemnly caused him to swear not to take a wife for Isaac from among the daughters of the idol-

worshipping Canaanites. He was fully aware of the decisive influence of the home in molding the character of children and therefore took the necessary steps to assure that Isaac's home would be presided over by a mother of religious zeal, kindness, and understanding.

Today we often hear complaints that the Jewish religion minimizes the role of women. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This erroneous conception of the minor role of women in the Jewish religion is attributable to the minimization of the importance of the home in our faith. We glorify the synagogue as the nerve center of Judaism, but ignore the home. Actually, throughout Jewish history the home has been the fortress of our faith. It was in the Jewish home, under the guidance and direction of the Jewish mother, where the character and destiny of Israel were shaped.

If the Jewish mother sincerely desires to regain the glorious role assigned to her by our faith, she must earnestly strive to restore to the home the sanctity and religious importance intended for it. When the home will once again become a Temple of G'd, the Jewish mother will then be its honored High Priestess.

Rabbi Benjamin Bak

תולדות

ויקראו שמו עשו — ויקרא שמו יעקב

Esau was always concerned about "what will they say?" "What will they call me?" He was the man who seeks only to find favor in the eyes of all; the man seeking popularity. Jacob was only concerned with "What will my father say; what will he call me?"

P.H.S.

תולדות

וידו אחוזת בעקב עשיו

There was already evident the bane of life for the Jew in the Galus. Jacob did not grab hold of Esau's head but his heel. The

Jew in Galus, would always tend to acquire some of the ways of his non-Jewish neighbor. But the tragedy is greater when Jacob does not absorb from the high principles; but from the insignificant.

The American Jew has hit a low in assimilation, when he considers himself a good American if he is a follower of sports, jazz, can play gin-rummy, and knows the names of all Hollywood stars. The Jew in the past was assimilated; but it was with Goethe, Mozart, Racine and Pascal. The American Jew did not identify himself with Whitman, Jefferson and the high principles of democracy. The sin of American Jewry is that,

„וידו אחוזת בעקב עשיו — שאדם דש בעקביו“

P.H.S.

ויצא

ויקרא לאחיו לאכל לחם (רש"י) אהביו

ויאמר לאחיו לקטו אבנים (רש"י) בניו שהיו לו אחים נגשים אליו לצרה ולמלחמה

There are those who come to the Synagogue לאכל לחם They will attend functions and dinners. They are the אהביו friends and patronizers of the Synagogue. But fortunately, we also have those who are with the Synagogue at every crisis and difficulty לצרה ולמלחמה They gather the stones and help build. They are truly the בני יעקב, the sons of the Synagogue.

P.H.S.

ויצא

ויקץ יעקב — ויקץ פרעה

Both Jacob and Pharaoh slept and had a dream. But there is a difference between the awakening of Jacob and the awakening of Pharaoh. Pharaoh awakened; but he goes back to sleep and ויחלום שנית But when ויקץ יעקב, he exclaims „מה נורא המקום“ and immediately builds an altar to G-d; and offers his share to Him.

There are times when we are aroused from our lethargy and idle dreams — on the High Holidays, at the time of a Bar Mitzvah; or, G-d forbid when sorrow strikes us. But alas ויחלום שנית the awakening is but temporary. Let us awaken, and let us be inspired and activated to the service of G-d and our people.

P.H.S.

וי

JACOB AND HIS DESCENDANTS

The theme of this week's Scriptural assignment centers about the life of our third patriarch, Jacob. Of the three patriarchs, Jacob unquestionably experienced the hardest life of all. His fate was one of exile, exploitation and fear.

At the very outset of his career, Jacob was forced to go into exile in order to escape the threats of Esau. Arriving at his uncle's home penniless, he labored faithfully and tirelessly for many years. His genius and application soon bore rich fruits, and Laban, his selfish host, reaped a rich harvest. Yet, no sooner did Jacob obtain some benefit himself, than he aroused the jealousy of Laban's sons, which compelled him once more to take the wanderer's staff and flee.

The story of Jacob is the story of the Jewish people generally. Like Jacob, many a Jew was forced to leave his native land in search of safety. He too came to his new home without any resources, yet, thanks to his native ability and intelligence, soon thrived and prospered. And, like his great Biblical predecessor, the Jew, wherever he settled, brought untold blessing and gain to the country of his adoption. He developed industry and trade. He excelled in science and the arts. He advanced learning and culture. And yet, all the contributions notwithstanding, he evoked the jealousy and even animosity of his erstwhile friends, when he himself began to prosper.

In two respects, however, Jacob's descendants deviated from the path trodden by their illustrious ancestor. Jacob was a realist and always knew when to flee. He correctly appraised the danger that confronted him and hastened to depart before it was too late.

The descendants of Jacob, unfortunately, on numerous occasions did not display that foresight. They vacillated and procrastinated, until the enemy overtook them. Reminiscent of the generation of Noah, our people ignored the warnings of the approaching flood and styled all forecasters of imminent danger as alarmists. Again, unlike Jacob, who in his greatest period of success remained loyal to his heritage, boasting as he did "with Laban I sojourned but the six hundred and thirteen commandments I observed", many of his descendants did not rise to this height and frequently abandoned the traditions of their forefathers upon the attainment of wealth and success.

May the experiences and trials of Jacob inspire us to emulate his wise and noble course in circumstances of trial as well as exultation.

Rabbi Benjamin Bak

וישלח

א"ר שמואל אמר לו עשו יעקב אחי נהלך שנינו בעוה"ז א"ל יעבר נא אדוני. עד עכשיו יש לי להעמיד חנניה מישאל ועזריא, דבר אחר עד עכשיו יש לי להעמיד מלך המשיח (דברים רבה א').

Jacob saw that assimilation on the worldly level may not harm us. It is possible to live as an American; and yet be a good Jew. We may have our Synagogues, Talmud Torahs and Yeshivahs. But he, however, saw that under such conditions we could not produce great Jews.

P.H.S.

וישלח

Why did no **ש** attack Abraham or Isaac? Why only Jacob? Abraham personified the attribute of "Chesed". Isaac is the symbol of "Tifloh". Jacob stands for Torah.

Esau's angel understood, that a Judaism without charity or without Synagogues may yet have a future. But a Judaism without Torah cannot exist.

P.H.S.