

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Golda Yehudis *bas* Yechiel a”h
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Like Son Like Father

PARSHAS LECH LECHA 5778

Avraham Avinu, as we know, was a self-made individual. He was born into a family and society of idolaters, yet he came to recognize the one true G-d. The familiar passage from the Pesach Haggadah states as much: מִתְחִלָּה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוּדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַכְשָׁיו קִרְבָּנוּ הַמְקוּם לְעֲבוּדָתוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם כֹּה־אָמַר ה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶבֶר הַנְּהָר יֹשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם תִּרְחַ אֲבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֲבִי נָחוֹר וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, וְאֶקַּח אֶת־אֲבִיכֶם אֶת־אַבְרָהָם מֵעֶבֶר הַנְּהָר וְאוֹלַף אוֹתוֹ ...כְּכֹל־אֲרָץ כְּנָעַן – “At first, our forefathers were idol-worshippers; but now, Hashem has drawn us close to serve Him. As it says (*Yehoshua* 24:2,3): ‘And Yehoshua said to the entire nation: So says Hashem the G-d of Yisrael: From the beginning, your forefathers dwelled on the other side of the river – Terach the father of Avraham and the father of Nachor – and they worshipped other gods. But I took your forefather Avraham from the other side of the river, and I escorted him throughout the entire Land of Cana’an...’”

Happy Ending

Now, Rashi informs us of a most fortunate development – namely, that Avraham’s father, Terach, eventually did *teshuvah* (repentance). This he derives from the *passuk* in this week’s *parshah*, when Hashem refers to Avraham’s eventual passing: וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם – “And you will come to your fathers in peace” (*Bereishis* 15:15). The implication is that Avraham would meet up with his late father, Terach, upon entering the Next World. Rashi wonders how this could be; after all, Terach was an idolator – what would he be doing waiting for Avraham in Gad Eden? It must be, Rashi concludes, that Terach repented while still alive.

While obviously a happy circumstance, there appears to be somewhat of a difficulty with Rashi’s conclusion, as we shall see. The issue arises from a landmark principle that emerges from the following Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 10:2):

שְׁלֹשָׁה מְלָכִים... אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא... יִרְבֵּעַם, אַחָאב, וּמְנַשֶּׁה.

“There are three (Biblical) kings... who do not have a share in the World to Come (on account of their wickedness): ...Yeravam, Achav, and Menasheh.”

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 104a) wonders why this list is not longer; seemingly, there were other candidates whose wickedness would more than qualify them for forfeiture of their portion in the Afterlife. One of these figures is King Amon (son of Menasheh), of whom the *passuk* states: וַיַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ד' כְּאִשֶּׁר עָשָׂה מְנַשֶּׁה אָבִיו... כִּי הוּא אָמוֹן הַרְבֵּה אֲשָׁמָה – “And he did that which was evil in the eyes of Hashem, as Menasheh his father had done... Yet he, Amon, exceeded in (his) guilt” (*Divrei Hayamim* II 33:22,23). Why, then, would Menasheh be included in the list, but not his more wicked son Amon?

The answer, continues the Gemara, is that Amon had a saving grace: namely, his righteous son Yoshiyahu. Thus is introduced the monumental notion of “*B’ra mezaka aba* – A son conveys merit to his father.” True, Amon himself excelled in wickedness; but he was able to attain a portion in the World to Come simply by dint of his meritorious son.

Up the Chain

Indeed, Rabbinic literature records a number of such occurrences. One prominent example of the “*B’ra mezakeh aba*” principle, involving the Sage R’ Zemira’ah, is related in the *Medrash Ha’ne’elam* (cited by the Chafetz Chayim [*Shemiras Ha’lashon, sec. 3, ch. 7*]). R’ Zemira’ah encountered a forlorn, disembodied soul that had been languishing in the torments of Gehinnom. The Sage took it upon himself to attempt to secure for him a rectification. He thus sought out the surviving son of this unfortunate, who turned out to be a sinner like his father. Nonetheless, R’ Zemira’ah took the son under his wing, training him in mitzvah observance and teaching him Torah. The pupil advanced exponentially in both the academic and spiritual sense, developing into a tremendous Torah scholar in his own right. Shortly thereafter, R’ Zemira’ah was visited again by the apparition, but this time was treated to glad tidings. The soul informed him of how his own plight was alleviated in conjunction with his son’s spiritual advancement – to the point that he himself was brought into Gan Eden and granted a throne among the righteous.

In any event, this notion poses something of an issue, it would seem, for Rashi’s assertion that Terach must have repented. As proof, Rashi had pointed to the fact that Hashem told Avraham that he would meet his father in Gan Eden; why would an idolater be there unless he had mended his ways? Based on the above, however, the proof seems to dissolve. It is quite possible, because of his righteous son, that Terach was able to enter Gan Eden even if he remained wicked until his dying day – just as Yoshiyahu was responsible for ensuring a portion in the World to Come for his father, Amon. *B’ra mezakeh aba*. Indeed, the Ramban actually maintains this position, contending that Terach did *not* repent, but was brought into Gan Eden because of Avraham’s righteousness. What, then, would Rashi answer? How was he so sure of his own contention?

The answer, explains the *Adnei Paz* (cited in *K’motzei Shalal Rav, parshas Lech Lecha*), is apparent from the verse itself, which utilizes the plural form: וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל־אֲבוֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם – “And you will come to your **fathers** in peace.” In other words, it seems that not only was Avraham’s father Terach awaiting his arrival in Gan Eden, but his grandfather Nachor was there as well. Thus, Terach’s own sojourn in Gad Eden could not be attributed solely to the righteousness of his own son; while that would have facilitated his own entry, it would not have extended to yet another, earlier generation. How, then, did Avraham’s *grandfather* merit a portion in Gan Eden? He was also an idolater! It must be that he was able to rely on the righteousness of his son Terach. Hence, as Rashi declared, we see that Terach must have repented in his lifetime, thereby meriting Gan Eden not only for himself, but his own father, as well.

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