

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
 with Reb Yoel Kahn

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COUNTERING THE SCOFFERS

The *parsha* begins with a *pasuk* which reads: "This is the history of *Yitzchak*, son of *Avraham* – *Avraham* begat *Yitzchak*." The second, seemingly redundant statement is explained by *Rashi* to allude to the fact that there were those who scoffingly claimed that *Yitzchak's* real father was *Avimelech*, and *Hashem* consequently responded by reshaping *Yitzchak's* face to resemble *Avraham's*, thus attesting to the fact that "*Avraham* begat *Yitzchak*."

This implies, of course, that *Yitzchak* had initially not been born in *Avraham's* likeness, and there's even a *Gemara* which states that *Hashem* "switched" *Yitzchak's* face, suggesting that they had previously looked completely different. This is surprising in view of the fact that children typically bear resemblance to their parents. Yet we're told that if not for *Hashem's* extraordinary intervention, *Yitzchak's* appearance would have borne no similarity to his father's!

Furthermore, although the soul and body ordinarily diverge, the physique of loftier, more refined individuals is more in sync with their spiritual side. Considering that *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* were both being equally saintly, it's therefore even more surprising that they weren't naturally alike.

TAMPERING WITH THE MERKAVA

The *Rebbe* explains that it was the *avos* in particular who are renowned for excelling in distinct modes of *avoda* – *Avraham* in *chesed* and *Yitzchak* in *gevura*. While both are rooted in holiness, and all of the *avos* were certainly able to make use of each other's *midos*, their natural approaches to serving *Hashem* remained apart, and can even be deemed opposites.

"If the *Torah* itself established these distinctions, what right did the *Baal Shem Tov* and his disciples have to reveal what was concealed?!"

In fact, it can be argued that *Yishmael*, being *chesed* of *kliya*, was more identical to *Avraham* in overall temperament, and *Esav* was likewise closer to *Yitzchak* in nature. So in view of the fact that the *avos* were inherently quite different, and considering that their bodies were extremely in tune with their souls, the natural outcome was that they were visually dissimilar as well.

Chesed is likened to water, both of which flow downwards, reaching out

to whatever is present below, whereas *gevura* is compared to fire, seeking to detach and rise above, and thus these two *midos* are, at their core, completely at odds. The *avos*, in turn, are likened to the *merkava*, the supernal chariot, where the face representing *chesed* faced rightward, and the face representing *gevura* leftward, emphasizing the great contrast between them, which is even more profound than

the mere difference between actual fire and water.

This all serves to enhance our appreciation for the significance of *Hashem's* act in response to the scoffers, because to change *Yitchak's* appearance to match *Avraham's* was in essence to tamper with the model of the *merkava*.

ALL TO SAVE A JEW

Parshas Toldos is always read in conjunction with the month of *Kislev*, the month associated with the revelation of the inner dimension of *Torah*. The revealed part of *Torah* is like *chesed*, water, engaging with the materialism of the lower world, being readily accessible, whereas the concealed part of *Torah* is entirely spiritual, and is focused upward.

This raises the question: If the *Torah* itself established these distinctions, what right did the *Baal Shem Tov* and his disciples have to reveal what was concealed?! Certainly they were acting with *Hashem's* consent, even on his command, but what indeed called for such a fundamental change?

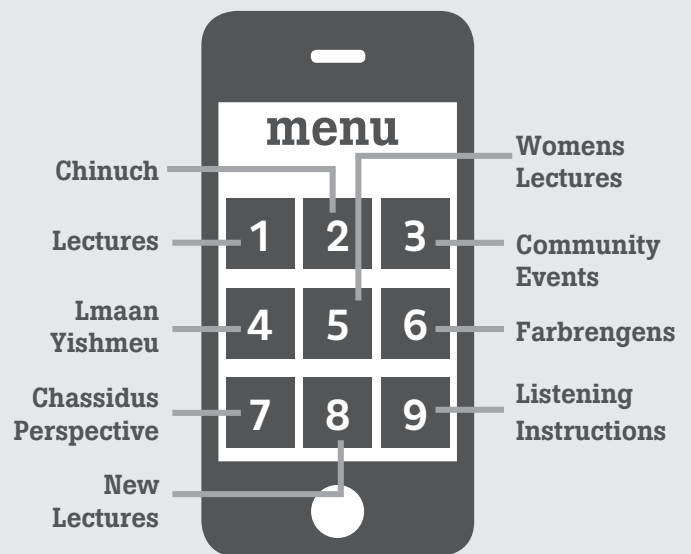
“When the identity of a Jewish child is at stake, when the ‘scoffers’ seek to sever his connection to *Avraham*, it is specifically *Yitzchak, gevura*, that which is concealed, that *Hashem* renders into *Avraham, revelation*.”

We can now appreciate that when the identity of a Jewish child is at stake, when the ‘scoffers’ seek to sever his connection to *Avraham*, it is specifically *Yitzchak, gevura*, that which is concealed, that *Hashem* renders into *Avraham, revelation*. Indeed, a deeper reason is given which is that *chassidus* was revealed as a preview of the imminent appearance of *Moshiach*, but, simply explained, this expresses *Hashem's* willingness to alter deeply embedded rules so that a Jewish child is unmistakably connected to *Avraham*.

ש"פ תולדות תשכ"ה - לקו"ש חלק ה' בהוספות. For further learning see

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