

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Essay 2. The connection between fathers and sons

מדרש רבה "ואלה תולדות יצחק בן-אברהם", פתיב "גול" [גיל] גיל אבי צדיק, גילה אחר גילה, בזמן שהוא צדיק בן צדיק, ויהי בימי אהז" וכו' אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה, רבון כל העולמים ווי שמלך אהז. אמר להם ברייתם הוא ואיני יכול לפשוט ידי בו עכ"ל. יש לדקדק מה ענין "ויהי בימי אהז" עם פסוק "גיל גיל אבי צדיק" וכו', ועוד למה דקא באהז אמרו מלאכי השרת ווי שמלך אהז ולא בן בשאר מלכים שעשו הרע בעיני ה'.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah**:

“And these are the generations of Isaac, son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac.”¹ It is written: “The father of a righteous man will greatly rejoice”²—joy after joy, when he is a righteous man, the son of a righteous man. “And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz [son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel marched upon Jerusalem to attack it; but they were not able to attack it].”³ The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: “Master of the Universe, woe that Ahaz has become king!” He said to them: “He is the son of Jotham, and I cannot stretch out My hand against him.”

- Gen. Rabbah 63:1

We need to examine: what is the connection between “And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz” and the verse “The father of a righteous man will greatly rejoice”?

Also, why did the ministering angels say “Woe that Ahaz has become king” specifically about Ahaz, and not about the other kings who did evil in the eyes of G-d?

ויש לומר שידוע שלפעמים הקב"ה כשרואה שאדם עתיד לחטוא, הוא מסלקו מן העולם קודם שיחטא, כדי להנצל מהעונש ויהי זכאי, וכן אמרו בכתוב "ואיננו כילקח אתו אלהים", וכן נמי ביבמות אמרינן בתו של רב, אם פשרה היא וראויה לצאת ממנה דבר טוב, היתה סיה.

It may be explained as follows: It is known that sometimes the Holy One, Blessed be He, when He sees that a person is destined to sin, He removes him from the world before he

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¹ Gen. 25:19.

² Prov. 23:24.

³ Isaiah 7:1.

sins, so that he may be spared from punishment and remain righteous. Thus it is said regarding Enoch, “and he was no more, for G-d took him.”⁴

Likewise, it is stated in Yevamot [sic]: “[Ulla said]: If the daughter of my teacher, [Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda,] was righteous, and she had the potential for something good to emerge from her, she would have lived.”⁵

ומלאכי השרת היו סוברים שזכות הבן אינו מועיל לאב פשהדריכו בדרך רעה, ואחז שבהורמנא דמלכותיה אסז בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות, שעל ידי כן בנו לא היה יכול לעסוק בתורה פדלקמן, היו טוענים שהיה לו להקב"ה לסלק את אחז מן העולם קודם שיחטא, שהרי עדיין היה כן עשרים פשמלך ואינו פר עונשיו מבית דין של מעלה, כיון שזמן הדין היה לו לזכות לעולם הבא בשביל חזקתו בנו, דברא מזכי אבא, וחזקתו היה אז בן משע שנים ובוצין בוצין מקטפי[ה] ידיע. וכיון שראו שמלך אמרו מלאכי השרת נוי שמלך אחז ויהיה אבוד מן העולם הבא.

The ministering angels were of the opinion that the son’s merit does not benefit the father when he guided him in a bad way. Ahaz [אחז] in the reign of his kingdom would seize [אחז] [achaz] synagogues and study halls, so that by this, his son would be unable to engage in Torah, as discussed below. Therefore, they argued that it would have been fitting for the Holy One, Blessed be He, to remove Ahaz from the world before he sinned, since he was still twenty years old when he became king and was not liable for punishment from the Heavenly Court, which only begins to administer punishment at that age.⁶

If that had happened, then according to the law, he should have merited the World-to-Come on account of his son Hezekiah, as it is said, “The son confers merit upon the father [as it is to the father’s credit that he raised a righteous son], but the father does not confer merit upon the son,”⁷ and Hezekiah was then nine years old, and “a pumpkin can be recognized from its blossoming stage [just as a great person can be recognized even from a young age].”⁸

However, once they saw that he became king, and began to sin, the ministering angels said, “Woe that Ahaz has become king, and he will be lost from the World-to-Come.”

בשלקא בשאר מלכים אף על פי שהיו בני צדיקים או שפניהם היו צדיקים לא קשיא להו למלאכי השרת, שהואיל שפבר הגיעו לכלל עונשים והתחילו לחטוא קודם מלכותם אפשר שהמלכות ניתנה להם לתשלום איזו טובה שעשו, וכדכתב "וימשלם לשנאיו אל-פניו להאבדו", שהמלכות לא ניתנה גרמא בקלקלתם הואיל שפבר קודם המלכות נעשו רשעים. ותרץ להם הקב"ה, פרייתם הוא ואיני יכול לפשוט ידי בו, דתנו בפברק ב' דעדיזת האב זוכה לבן, בנוי, בפח, פעושר, ובתכמה, ובשנים וכו', ופירשו המפרשים ז"ל דהא דקיימא לו דאבא לא מזכי ברא, דנקא בעולם הבא, אכל בעולם הזה אף אבא מזכי ברא, וכנראה מפשט המשנה זו, וזה שמלך הוא מפני זכות אביו, ואיני יכול לפשוט את ידי בו לסלקו מן העולם קודם שיחטא.

Granted, regarding other kings, even though they were the sons of righteous men or their sons were righteous, it did not trouble the ministering angels, since it is possible that

⁴ Gen. 5:24. In Gen. Rabbah 25:1, we read: “Rabbi Aivu said: Enoch was capricious; sometimes righteous, sometimes wicked. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: ‘While he is still in his righteousness, I will take him away.’”

⁵ Bava Kamma 38b.

⁶ Shabbat 89b.

⁷ Sanhedrin 104a.

⁸ Berachot 48a.

they had already reached the stage of punishment and had begun to sin before their reign. Perhaps the kingship was given to them to fulfill some good they had done, as it is written, “But those who hate Him, He will repay to their face by destruction.”⁹ This means that the kingship was not the cause of their corruption, since they had already become wicked before their reign.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered them, “He is the son of Jotham, and I cannot stretch out My hand against him.” As it is taught in the second chapter of *Eduyot* (Mishnah 9), “the father merits the son, with beauty, with strength, with wealth, and with wisdom and with years.” The commentators explain that we hold that “a father does not confer merit upon his son” specifically for the World-to-Come, but in this world, a father can confer merit upon his son. This is evident from the straightforward meaning of the Mishnah, which indicates that his kingship is due to the merit of his father. Therefore, G-d was saying, “I cannot stretch out My hand to remove him from the world before he sins.”

וְכַתּוּב הַתּוֹסְפוֹת יוֹם טוֹב שֶׁהַתּוֹסְפוֹתָא סְבִירָא לֵה דְחַכְמִים פְּלִיגִי עַל רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שְׂאִין הָאֵב זֹכָה לְבָנוּ בְּאֵלּוּ הַדְּבָרִים אֵלָּא עַד הַפֶּרֶק שְׂעֵדִין לֹא הִגִּיעַ לְעוֹנַת חַיִּיב מִצְוֹת, אֲבָל מִשְׁהִגִּיעַ לְפֶרֶק, אִם הוּא צָדִיק זֹכָה מִעֲצָמוֹ וְאִם לֹא אִין אָבִיו זֹכָה לוֹ, וְאַחַר כֵּן הִבִּיא בְּשֵׁם הַיְרוּשְׁלָמִי שְׂאִם הָאֵב זֹכָה הָיִין לִיה בְּנִים מִתּוֹאֲרִים בְּאֵלּוּ הַדְּבָרִים אִף שְׂכָר הִגִּיעוּ לְפֶרֶק וְלֹא יִנְפוּ, וְכֵן פִּירֵשׁ גְּמִי הָרַב עוֹבְדֵינָה מִבְּרִטְנִירָא בְּפִירוּשׁוֹ הַשְּׁנִי וְעִי"שׁ.

Tosafot Yom Tov wrote that the *Tosefta* holds the opinion that the sages disagree with Rabbi Akiva, who says that a father does confer merit upon his son in these matters, but only as long as the son has not yet reached the age of obligation in the commandments. However, once the son reaches that age, if he is righteous, he merits on his own, and if he is not righteous, his father does not merit for him.

He then brought in the name of the Jerusalem Talmud that if the father does merit, the sons will be considered righteous in these matters, even if they have already reached the age of obligation and they will not merit. Similarly, this is explained by Rabbi Ovadia of Bartinuro in his second explanation, as mentioned there.

וְהִכִּי גְּמִי מְצִינוּ שְׁתֵּי פִירוּשִׁים עַל בְּרָא מְזַכֵּי אָבָא, הָרֵאשׁוֹן הוּא בְּמַהֲרָשׁ"א פֶּרֶק י"א דְּסִנְהֶדְרִין (דָּף ק"ד) וְז"ל, לְפִי שְׂדֵרָה קִצַּת רְשָׁעִים שְׂאִין רוֹצִים שְׂיִהְיוּ בְּנֵיהֶם כְּמוֹתֶם אֵלָּא שְׂיִהְיוּ צְדִיקִים, וְעַל כֵּן בְּרָא מְזַכֵּי אָבָא, שְׂאָבִיו אִף עַל פִּי שְׂהִיָּה רְשָׁע הוּא הִיָּה מוֹכִיחוֹ לְהַדְרִיכוֹ בְּדֵרָה טוֹבָה עַכ"ל. וְהַשְּׁנִי בְּעִיּוֹן יַעֲקֹב שְׂכַתּוֹב הַטַּעַם, מִשּׁוּם דְּהָבֵן כְּרָעָא דְאַבּוּהָ הוּא וְכוּחוֹ בְּגוּפוֹ דְּגְמִי עַכ"ל.

Thus we also find two interpretations of “the son confers merit upon the father.” The first is in the Maharsha on chapter 11 of tractate Sanhedrin (page 104a), and this is his language: “It is the way of some wicked people not to want their sons to be like them, but to be righteous. Therefore, “the son confers merit upon the father,” meaning that although the father was wicked, he would rebuke and guide his son along the good path.”

The second interpretation is from *Iyun Yaakov*, who writes the reason as follows: “The son is like the leg of his father, and his strength is similar to his father’s body.”

⁹ Deut. 7:10.

ואלו השתי פירושים הם ממש מכוונים לשתי פירושים שהבאנו על מתניתין דעדות, שהרי הפירוש הראשון דהיינו התוספתא דזכות האב אינה מועלת לבנו אלא עד הפרק, אף ברא לא מזפי אבא אלא כשהאב הדריכו בדרך טובה כפירוש מהרש"א. אבל כשהאב לא הדריכו אינו מועיל כלום לאביו, שהכל הולך אחר זכות עצמו. ומה שפירש העיון יעקב שהאיל שבא מכוחו לעולם מועיל אף אם לא הוכיחו אביו, זה אתי כפירוש השני של הירושלמי, דזכות האב לעולם מועיל לבנו.

These two interpretations are precisely aligned with the two explanations we brought regarding the Mishnah in *Eduyot*. The first interpretation, which is the *Tosefta*, says that the father's merit is not effective for his son except until the point where the son reaches the age of obligation. But a son does not confer merit upon his father, unless the father guided him on a good path, per the explanation of the Maharsha. But if the father did not guide him, it does not help the father, and everything follows the son's own merit.

As for what the *Iyun Yaakov* explained, that since [the son] came to the world from his father's efforts, it will benefit the son, even if his father doesn't reprove him, this aligns with the second explanation in the Jerusalem Talmud, that the father's merit always benefits the son.

ומעתה נבא לדברי המדרש, מתחלה אמר גילה אחר גילה בזמן שהוא צדיק בן צדיק, וקשה מה מועיל זכות הבן לאב שכבר הוא צדיק, אם נאמר כפירוש מהרש"א מפני שאביו הוכיחו והביאו לדרך הישרה, הלא כף היתה חובתו לעשות אפילו לאדם אחר היכא שבנדו למחות, וכשעשה חובתו להוכיח כבר גמר מצותו ויקבל שכר הראוי לו על תוכחה זו שעשה, בין אם יהיה בנו או אדם אחר.

Now we will address the words of the Midrash. Initially, it said, "joy after joy, when he is a righteous man, the son of a righteous man." A question is how does the merit of the son confer a benefit to the father, who is already righteous? If we say, as per the explanation of the Maharsha, that this is because the father rebuked him and guided him to the right path, we must ask: wasn't it his obligation to do this, even for a different person other than his son, if he has the ability to rebuke him? I.e., if we see a fellow Jew doing something wrong, we are supposed to rebuke him. Once he has done his duty to rebuke, he has fulfilled his commandment and will receive the appropriate reward for the rebuke, whether it was for his son or for someone else.

דבשלקא כשהאב רשע ומוכיח את בנו ומדריכו בדרך הטובה, מדה זו נקראת קצת חרטה על עוונותיו, שמורה הוא שיותר טוב להתרחק מדרך הרעה. וזה לא שיהי אלא בבנו דנקא לשכפוף תחת ידו, דאילו לאדם אחר אין דבריו גשמעים, משום "טול קורה מבין עיניך" וכו' ועוד קרא פתיב "התקושושו וקושו" קשוט עצמה וכו'. אלא נדאי צריך לומר כפירוש העיון יעקב שמה שהאב זוכה בשביל בנו אינו מטעם זכות התוכחה אלא שהדין נותן שכשהבן מתענג מעונג הגן עדן יתענג גם האב באותו חלק של הבן ממש, לפי שפחו כגופו דמי.

Granted, when the father is wicked and rebukes his son, guiding him to the good path, this behavior is considered a bit of regret for his own sins, showing that it is better to distance oneself from the bad way. This is only relevant to his son, specifically, who is under his authority, because if it were another person, his words would not be heard, because of the

principle, “remove the splinter from between your eyes [i.e., rid yourself of some minor infraction],”¹⁰ and also, it is written, “Gather yourselves together, gather together [*hitkosheshu vakoshu*],”¹¹ and Reish Lakish says this teaches, “Adorn [*kashet*] yourself, and then adorn others.”¹²

Therefore, we must certainly say, as *Iyun Yaakov* explains, that the merit the father gains from his son is not because of the merit of the rebuke, but rather because the law is that when the son enjoys the delights of the Garden of Eden, the father also shares in that enjoyment, since the son is considered like the father’s own body.

וכְּנוֹנֵת הַמְדַרְשׁ הוּא לְתַרְץ לְמָה אָמַר הַפְּתוּב, "בְּנוֹ-אֲבָרְהָם", וְעוֹד הוֹסִיף, "אֲבָרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק", וְכָבַד הֵינּוּ יוֹדְעִים זֶה, אֲלֵא לְהוֹדִיעַ שְׁנוֹתֵיבָה שְׂכָרוֹ שֶׁל אֲבָרְהָם מִחֲמַת זְכוּתוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק, וְלֹא מִשׁוֹם שֶׁהִדְרִיכוּ בְּדַרְךְ הַטּוֹבָה בְּלִבָּד, אֲלֵא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה אָבִיו, שֶׁ"אֲבָרְהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת-יִצְחָק".

The intent of the Midrash is to explain why the verse says, “Isaac, son of Abraham,” and further adds, “Abraham begot Isaac,” for we already knew this from the previous parasha. Rather, it was to inform us that Abraham’s reward was increased because of the merit of Isaac, not merely because he guided him along the good path, but because he was his father, that “Abraham begot Isaac.”

וְכִי הֵיכִי דָלָא תִימָא מֵאֵן מוֹכַח שְׂיִהְיֶה הָאֵמֶת פְּדָ, מִשׁוֹם הֵכִי לְהוֹרוֹת סְבָרָא זֹו הִבִּיא "וַיְהִי בֵימֵי אַחָז" שְׁמִלְשָׁם נִרְאָה שְׂזָכוֹת יוֹתָם עֲמֵדָה לְאַחָז אִף לְאַחַר שֶׁהִגִּיעַ לְפָרֶק, שֶׁהָרִי מְלֶכֶּ שֶׁשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנִים כְּמוֹ שְׁמֶלֶךְ אָבִיו יוֹתָם. וְהֵינּוּ כְּמַתְנִיתִין, הָאֵב זֹכָה לְבֵן בְּשָׁנִים וּבְעוֹשֶׁר וְכוּ'. וְאִם הֵיךְ הַטַּעַם דְּבָרָא מְזַפֵּי אָבָא כְּפִירוּשׁ מִהַרְשָׁ"א, הֵכִי נְמִי זְכוּת יוֹתָם שֶׁהוּא הָאֵב לֹא הֵיךְ לוֹ לְהוֹעִיל לְאַחָז אֲלֵא עַד הַפָּרֶק וְתוֹ לֹא. אֲלֵא וְדָאִי מִדְּחִזִּינָן שֶׁהוֹעִיל זְכוּת הָאֵב לְבָנוֹ אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהָיָה רָשָׁע וּכְפִירוּשׁ הִרְוֹשׁ לְמִי, אִם כֵּן אִף בְּרָא מְזַפֵּי אָבָא הֵינּוּ בְּלֹא הַטַּעַם שֶׁל הַתּוֹכְחָה שֶׁעָשָׂה לוֹ וְמִי שֶׁהוּא צְדִיק וּבָנוֹ צְדִיק מְלַבֵּד וְכוּ' וְשֶׁכֵּר הַתּוֹכְחָה יֵשׁ לוֹ שְׂכָר חֲדָשׁ לְהַתְעַנֵּג גַּם הוּא בְּחֶלֶק הָעוֹנֵג שֶׁל בְּנוֹ, הוּאִיל שֶׁבָנוֹ הוּא פְּכוּחוֹ וּבְרָא כְּרַעַא דְּאָבוּהָ.

So that one does not say, “Who can prove that the truth is like this,” for this reason, to teach this reasoning, it brought the example of “and it came to pass in the days of Ahaz,” where it appears that the merit of Jotham stood for Ahaz even after he reached the age of obligation in the commandments. After all, he ruled for sixteen years, just as his father Jotham had reigned. This aligns with the Mishnah, which teaches that the father merits the son with years and with wealth, etc.

If the explanation of “the son confers merit upon the father” was as the explanation of the Maharsha, so too the merit of Jotham, who was the father, should only have benefited Ahaz to the point of reaching the age of obligation in the commandments, and no further. Rather, certainly we see that the merit of the father benefits the son even though [the son] was wicked, according to the explanation of the Jerusalem Talmud.

If so, “the son confers merit upon the father” means even without the reason of the rebuke that he gave him. One who is righteous, and whose son is also righteous, besides his

¹⁰ Bava Batra 15b; Arachin 16b.

¹¹ Zeph. 2:1.

¹² Bava Batra 60b; Bava Metzia 107b; Sanhedrin 18a.

own strength and the reward of the rebuke, has a new reward: to enjoy his son's share of pleasures in the World-to-Come, since the son is considered like the father's strength, and the son is like the leg of his father.

ואחר הדברים האלה הענינו ברור מעצמו כנאמר לעיל, שאמרו המלאכים, ווי שמלך אהז, היינו מפני שהיו סוברים שכאן באהז שאדרבא אהז כל בתי כנסיות ומדרשות ומנע את בנו מללמוד תורה, אינו מן הראוי שיזכה בשביל בנו, ולכן אמרו ווי שמלך אהז, שמלכותו גרמה לו שיהיה לו כח למנוע התורה. והקב"ה השיב להם, בן-ייתם הוא וכו', קלומר פשם שזכות יותם הועילה לו חוץ לפרק כסברת הירושלמי הנאמר לעיל, אף זכות הבן יועיל לאב, משום דברא פרא דאבוי כסברת העיון יעקב הנאמר לעיל, ולא יהיה אבוד מן העולם הבא.

After these words, the matter is clear in itself, as mentioned earlier. The angels said, “Woe that Ahaz has become king,” meaning that they believed that in the case of Ahaz, who took control of all the synagogues and study halls and prevented his son from studying Torah, it was not appropriate that he should merit because of his son. Therefore, they said, “Woe that Ahaz has become king,” because his kingship gave him the power to prevent Torah study.

The Holy One, Blessed be He, responded to them, “He is the son of Jotham, and I cannot stretch out My hand against him,” as if to say that just as the merit of Jotham benefited him even beyond the age of obligation, as explained in the Jerusalem Talmud mentioned earlier, so too, the merit of the son will benefit the father, because the son is like the leg of his father, as explained in *Iyun Yaakov* earlier. Thus, the father will not be lost from the World-to-Come.

ועוד יש לומר שרמז להם שהואיל שהוא בן-ייתם ואבא מזפי ברא בעולם הזה, זכות יותם יועיל לו לפקח עיני שכלו של חזקיה לגרור עצמתיו ולבזותו בעולם הזה, כדי שיקבל ענשו בכאן ואחר כך יזכה לעולם הבא.

Furthermore, one can say that He hinted to them that since [Ahaz] is the son of Jotham, and a father merits for his son in this world, the merit of Jotham will benefit [Ahaz] to open the eyes of the intellect of his son, Hezekiah, to drag [Ahaz's] bones and disgrace him in this world, so that he would receive his punishment here, and afterward, he would merit the World-to-Come. That is, Scripture says that Ahaz “was buried in the city of Jerusalem, but he was not placed in the tombs of the kings of Israel.”¹³ The Gemara explains that King Hezekiah “dragged the bones of his father [Ahaz] on a bier of ropes [and did not afford him the respect due to a king].”¹⁴

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¹³ II Chron. 28:27.

¹⁴ Pesachim 56a.