

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter VIII: Vayishlach (Gen. 32:4–36:43)

### Essay 13. A wise son and a foolish son

**"בן חכם ישמח־אב ובן כסיל תוגת אמו". יש לדקדק למה בן חכם אמר "ישמח־אב" ובן כסיל העונש הוא של אמו.**

**“The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes his father happy; but a foolish son is his mother’s sorrow” (Prov. 10:1). We need to examine why for a wise son it says, “makes his father happy,” but for a foolish son the punishment is his mother’s.**

וְיֵשׁ לֵאמֹר שֶׁהַבֵּן חָכֵם מוֹסִיף שְׂבַח אָבִיו שֶׁהָרִי הוּא הַדְּרִיכּוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְהַכְּסִיל מוֹסִיף תּוֹגָה לְאִמּוֹ דְּוָקָא שֶׁהָרִי כְּתוּב רַשִׁי עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם עַל הַפְּסוּק "וַתִּמָּת דְּבָרָה מִיְנִקֵּת רַבְקָה", וְנִתְבַּשֵּׁר שֶׁם בְּאֶבֶל שְׂנִי, שֶׁהוּגַד לוֹ עַל אִמּוֹ שֶׁמָּתָה. וְלִפְיֶכָּה הַעֲלִימוֹ אֶת יוֹם מוֹתָהּ כְּדִי שְׁלֵא יִקְלְלוּ הַבְּרִיּוֹת כְּרֵס שֶׁיִּצְאָ מִמֶּנָּה עֲשׂוֹ, אַף הַכְּתוּב לֹא פָרְסָמָהּ. וְכֵן מִצִּינּוֹ לְעַנְיָן הַטּוֹבָה דְּקִאָמֵר קִרָא "בְּרַכַּת שְׂדִים וְרַחֵם" וְאָמְרוּ ו"ל בְּרִיךְ דְּדִיּא דְּדִין וְנִיקוּ. וְכֵן שְׁפִיר קִאָמֵר "וּבֵן כְּסִיל תּוֹגַת אִמּוֹ" שֶׁהָרִי מֵיִתָּת יִצְחָק פְּתָבָה בְּתוֹרָה וְלֹא חָשׂ לְשׁוֹם דְּבָר, אֲבָל עַל מֵיִתָּת רַבְקָה חָשׂ הַכְּתוּב.

**It can be said that the wise son adds praise to his father, for he guided him in a straight path, and the fool adds sorrow to his mother precisely because of what Rashi, may he rest in peace, wrote on the verse, “And Deborah, Rebecca’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak tree [alon] [אלון] below Bethel; so it was named Alon-bachut” (Gen. 35:8). Rashi wrote: “We are informed there of another mourning, for he was told that his mother had died. In Greek, ‘alon’ means ‘another.’ Because of this, the day of her death was kept secret, so that people would not curse the mother from whom Esau came. Thus, Scripture does not [openly] publicize [her death].” We also find regarding the good [son] that Scripture says, “Blessings of the breast and womb” (Gen. 49:25), and [the rabbis] of blessed memory say, “Blessed be the breasts that nursed you and the womb from which you issued” (Gen. Rabbah 98:20). Thus, it’s fine that it says, “but a foolish son is his mother’s sorrow,” for the death of Isaac is written in the Torah and it’s not afraid of anything, but regarding the death of Rebecca, Scripture is afraid to say anything.**

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ועוד שאמרו ז"ל בפרק בן סורר ומורה "דברי למואל מלך" מלמד שכפתתו אמו על העמוד אמרה לו "מה-ברי" וכו' הכל יודעים שאביה ראה שמים הוא, עכשיו יאמרו אמו גרמה לו, וצריף טעם למה דוקא יאמרו שאמו גרמה לו, ולמה דוקא יברכו השדים.

**Also, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said on the chapter of the “wayward and defiant son:”<sup>1</sup>**

**“The words of king Lemuel; the burden wherewith his mother chastised him. [What, my son? and what, O son of my womb? And what, O son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. Wine is not for kings, O Lemuel; not for kings to drink, nor any strong drink for princes. Lest they drink and forget what has been ordained, and infringe on the rights of the poor.]”** (Prov. 31:1–5). Rabbi Yochanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: This teaches that [Solomon’s] mother [Bathsheba saw Solomon engaged in excessive drinking and] **bound him to a pillar** [to have him flogged]. **And she said to him: “What, my son?” Everyone knows that your father, [David], feared G-d. Now, [when they see you sin], they will say [that] his mother caused him [to drink].**

-Sanhedrin 70b

וגיש לומר דגרסינן בפרק קמא דסוטה "האלף וקראתי לה אשה מינקת מן העברית" וכו'. מלמד שהזוירתו על כל המצרייות ולא רצה לינק. אמר הקב"ה, פה שעתיד לדבר עמי ינק דבר טמא? וזה שכתוב "אתמי יורה דעה" וכו'. למי יורה דיעה למי שהוא גמול מחלב, שנגמלה אמו ושמה עצמה מלאכול דבר טמא. וזהו הטעם שנגמר בירמיה "יבטרום תצא מרחם הקדושתיה", שעשיתי שאמה לא תטעום דבר טמא, כמו שאמרו ז"ל השתא בהמתן של צדיקים אין הקב"ה מביא תקלה על ידן צדיקים עצמן וכו'.

**It can be said that it’s written in the first chapter of tractate Sotah:**

**“Then said his sister to Pharaoh’s daughter: Shall I go and call you a nurse of the Hebrew women [that she may nurse the child for you]?”** (Ex. 2:7). And what is different about the Hebrew women? **This teaches that they took Moses around to all the Egyptian [wet nurses] and he did not want to nurse. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, “Should a mouth, that in the future will speak with Me, nurse something impure?” And this is as it is written: “Whom shall one teach knowledge? [And whom shall one make understand the message? To whom expound a message? To those [just] weaned from milk, [just] taken away from the breast?]”** (Isaiah 28:9). **To whom should He teach the knowledge [of Torah]? To one who is weaned from milk,<sup>2</sup> for his mother has weaned him and guarded herself from eating something impure.**

- Sotah 12b

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 21:18–21.

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrasing the end of Isaiah 28:9.

**This is the meaning why it says in Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the belly, I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet unto the nations” (Jer. 1:5). That I arranged that your mother wouldn’t taste something impure, as [the rabbis] of blessed memory said, “Now, [if] through the animals of the righteous, the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not bring a stumbling block, [then through] the righteous themselves, all the more so is it not so [that He does not bring about stumbling blocks]?”<sup>3</sup>**

וכן אמרו "זרו רשעים מרחם" שאמם אוכלת דברים טמאים המטמאים אותם וכו'. ואף על פי שגבן חכם גם אמו לפי זה יש לה חלק בו. וכדתנן באבות רבי יהושע בן חנניה אשרי יולדתו. מפל מקום, אמר הכותב "ישמח-אב", ולא "ישמח-אם" נמי, משום דבמקום האיש אין האשה חשובה לכלום, כדאיתא בזוהר (חלק ג' דף קפ"ג ע"ב) באתר דאשתכח דכר, אפילו מאה נוקבי, דכר קרינן לכולא.

**Similarly, they said, “ ‘The wicked are defiant from the womb’ (Ps. 58:4), that their mother eats impure things, that render them impure” (Yoma page 83a). Nevertheless, for a wise son, according to this, his mother too has a share in this. Also, we learned in Pirkei Avot (2:8), “[Regarding] Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah, happy is the woman who gave birth to him.” In any event, Scripture says “makes his father happy,” and does not also [say] “makes his mother happy,” because in a place where there is a man, the wife is not considered at all, as it is brought in the Zohar (parshat Chukat; part III, page 173b), “And where a male is found, even [if there are] one hundred females [present], they are all [grammatically] called male.”**

**ועוד** בדרך אחרת, יובן הפסוק במה שאמרו במסכת קידושין פירק קמא תנו רבנן הוא ללמוד ובנו ללמוד, הוא קודם לבנו, ואם הנה בנו נריו ומוצלה ומלמודו מתקיים בידו בנו קודמו עכ"ל. ואמר הכותב "בן חכם" אף על פי שהאב צריך שיתעבב מלידה ללמוד בשבילו לפי שהוא חריף ומלמודו מתקיים בידו, עם כל זה יש לו שמחה לאב בבו חכם. אבל בבו פסיל אז אין לאב כל כך עצבות, מפני שאז הולך בעצמו ללמוד. אבל האם יושבת עגונה כי בעלה, שהיא האב, צריך שילך ללמוד, ונהו "ובן פסיל תוגת אמו".

**Also, in another way, the verse will be understood by what [the rabbis] said in tractate Kiddushin, the first chapter (29b), “The Sages taught: If one [wishes] to learn [Torah himself] and his son [also wants] to learn, he takes precedence over his son. Rabbi Yehuda says: If his son is diligent and sharp, and his learning will endure, his son takes precedence over him.” Scripture said, “a wise son”—even though the father should be delayed from going to learn for himself, because [his son] is sharp and his learning will endure, nevertheless he has the joy of a father of a wise son. But for a foolish son, then the father does not have so much sadness, because then he will go by himself to learn Torah. But the mother sits anchored, because her husband, who is the father of the foolish son, needs to go to learn, and this is why Scripture says, “but a foolish son is his mother’s sorrow.”**

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<sup>3</sup> Yevamot 99b; Ketubot 28b; Gittin 7a; Chullin 5b, 6a, 7a.