

## SIDRA OF THE WEEK: תולדות

1. Yitzchok the son of Avrohom has married Rivkah the daughter of Besu'el and after a long time and much prayer, Rivkah becomes pregnant. During her pregnancy, Rivkah experiences unusually sharp pains. Other women, to whom she described what she was feeling, tell her that her pains are not at all in the nature of childbearing and Yitzchok, although a prophet, is not able to explain what her pains signify. Rivkah goes to enquire for the meaning of her unusual experiences from Shem and Ayver (both prophets) who were not far from Be'er She'va where Yitzchok and Rivkah lived, and she is told by Shem that she has two very different children within her, who will grow into two vastly different nations. (At the time, it was difficult to envisage the dramatically different ways in which her twin children would develop, but at the same time Rivkah knew that there must be a reason for her being told about this rather than Yitzchok. Rivkah understood, too, that if this information was withheld by HaShem from Yitzchok then it was not for her to divulge it.)
2. Twin sons are born: Aysov (the firstborn) and Yaakov. Both are good sons to their parents and despite their differences they are brothers and close to each other, and both are dearly loved by their parents. But as they grow up, the differences between them indeed do become clearer — just as had been foretold to Rivkah. Yaakov is a straight-forward person and righteous, and always in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ayver, and Aysov is a huntsman and a fighter, interested only in the pleasures of this world.
3. On the day that Avrohom their grandfather dies, Yaakov has returned home in advance of Yitzchok and the rest of the family who were on their way back from Chevron where they had buried Avrohom in the Cave of Machpayloh. He is busy cooking the mourner's meal for his father Yitzchok when Aysov returns from his hunting. Yaakov, although still a youngster (the twins were fifteen years old at the time) understandably has his mind focused on the future. He thinks how now that Avrohom has died so suddenly and unexpectedly (thus sparing him from seeing how Aysov his grandson has developed into a person so different from his ideals) it is fortunate indeed that his father Yitzchok rather than his uncle Yishmo'el has for some time now been recognized as the spiritual successor of Avrohom and his mission to the world. But the thought that is uppermost in Yaakov's mind now, and especially on this day, is how the work of Avrohom and Yitzchok will continue when Yitzchok, too, is no longer alive. Yishmo'el long ago made way for his brother Yitzchok — but how very different things would have been if he had not done so! And now, what of the future? Can Aysov really be expected to carry on the teachings of the House of Avrohom any more than Yishmo'el would have? Indeed, is Aysov at all even interested in this kind of future for himself and his descendants? Yaakov earnestly voices his thoughts to his brother. In all seriousness, he asks Aysov to let him be considered the firstborn in much the same way as their uncle Yishmo'el made way for their father Yitzchok. In this way, the traditions started by Avrohom and continued by Yitzchok would pass through Yaakov to his descendants, to develop into the Jewish People in the spirit of Avrohom and Yitzchok. Aysov, only too aware, unhappily, of the heavy responsibilities and duties that devolve upon the People of Avrohom, gladly makes way for Yaakov. Their agreement is sealed

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by Yaakov having given to Aysov a meal with some of the red pottage that he had cooked for Yitzchok his father.

4. When another famine comes to the land of Kenaan, Yitzchok and his family make to move down to Egypt where there is plenty of food, but HaShem tells him to stay in the Holy Land where he will be blessed with all good in the merit of Avrohom, and Yitzchok stays in the region of Gerror. It was in Gerror that Avimelech (a generic term for the kings of the Philistines, as is Par'o for the kings of Egypt) came close to taking Rivkah — he had thought that she was only the clanswoman of Yitzchok, and not in fact his wife, too. He summoned Yitzchok to berate him for not telling people that she was indeed his wife. Yitzchok's silence was enough rebuke for Avimelech to understand that it was Avimelech and his people who were at fault for assuming that they can treat the womenfolk of foreigners in such a shameless way, without any fear of G-d, and Avimelech accepts this rebuke. He guarantees the safety of Yitzchok and Rivkah by issuing a warning to all his people not to harm them. In this way, HaShem ensures that Yitzchok too is suddenly shot to fame by this personal contact with the country's ruler and his teachings about HaShem thereby come to the attention of the whole population. (See **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : לך לך** and **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וירא**, where the same thing happened with Avrohom.)
5. Yitzchok prospers greatly in the country of the Philistines (despite some enmity on the part of the inhabitants) — so greatly, in fact, that they and their king become jealous and Yitzchok is asked to leave their locality and he is forced to return to the land of Kenaan. With this, it is seen how the Exile of 400 years of which Avrohom had been told by HaShem, has started. For whereas Avrohom was honoured as “a Prince of G-d,” Yitzchok his son is respectfully tolerated but envied (but Yaakov will be made to feel hated).
6. Yitzchok continues to prosper and Avimelech, the king of the Philistines, relents somewhat from his incivility and comes to make with him a Treaty of Non-aggression at Be'er She'va. Recognizing that Yitzchok is blessed by HaShem (he is an exceedingly wealthy man and powerful) Avimelech thinks it is wise to reinforce the Treaty of Friendship that was made with Avrohom. Although he doesn't go so far as to invite Yitzchok back to the land of the Philistines, he asks Yitzchok to promise that he (and his children and grandchildren) will not harm the Philistine people, “for, after all, when we expelled you from our country, we didn't confiscate your belongings and thus we have dealt kindly with you.” Yitzchok, while wryly pointing out to Avimelech how the Philistines had in fact been anything but kind — for instance, the servants of Avimelech had blocked up his wells with earth — agrees to the proposed Non-aggression Pact. (The Jewish People held themselves to this pact with great honour, far beyond the actual terms of the treaty: even centuries later, we did not take possession of Yerushola'im because it was inhabited by the descendants of Avimelech's Philistines. Only when they attacked the Jewish People, quite unprovoked, were we at last able to retaliate, and we then drove them out completely.)
7. Many years pass and Yitzchok continues the teachings of his father Avrohom. But then Aysov marries two idol-worshipping Chittite women: understandably, both Yitzchok and Rivkah are greatly disappointed at this rejection of the traditions of the House of Avrohom. Although Yitzchok is unhappily aware of the kind of person that Aysov is, in his fondness for his firstborn son he cannot see just how far removed he is from the ideals of the House of Avrohom. In his mind's eye, therefore, he envisages the future Jewish Nation being composed of two interacting elements: Aysov and his descendants

would play their role in the physical and material world, providing the worldly needs and the strength and security of the Jewish People, with Yaakov and his descendants being the spiritual guides and moral leaders of the Nation. Rivkah, however, although she loves Aysov as her son, knows otherwise. Especially now, seeing how Aysov has with his marriages turned his back on the House of Avrohom, she sees how the prophecy of so many years ago which spoke of the differences between her two sons is coming true, and that with time those differences would become even greater and more pronounced.

8. Yitzchok, whose eyesight has been dimmed for most of his life but is now failing him, feels that his life is drawing to an end, and he now calls for his firstborn son Aysov. Although he is greatly saddened by Aysov, and even though Rivkah has gently tried repeatedly to show that he is misled in his hopes for Aysov, Yitzchok still feels that Aysov has a part to play in the future Jewish Nation, and he wishes to bestow upon him his blessing for the future. Unlike Yitzchok, however, Rivkah is not blind to the utter unsuitability of Aysov as having any role within the Jewish Nation, but she has not been able to convince Yitzchok how he has been deceived and how his hopes for Aysov cannot be realized.
9. Yitzchok had told Aysov to go out and fetch something from his hunting and prepare a meal for him. In this way, Yitzchok meant to indicate to Aysov that he should use his inborn prowess and skills for the good. By utilizing his natural talents in this way, Yitzchok intimates, Aysov, although so different to Yaakov, can yet be worthy of being a part of the future People of Avrohom, the Jewish People. Now, when Rivkah hears how Yitzchok has summoned Aysov, she is moved by Divine Inspiration, and in the interest of the future Jewish Nation, she decides that now she must demonstrate, once and for all, that all along Yitzchok has allowed himself to be deceived by Aysov. Her tactic is harsh but simple, namely, she will show Yitzchok how easy it is to deceive him.
10. Rivkah calls for her son Yaakov and commands him to take a tasty meal that she has prepared and go in to Yitzchok and pretend that he is Aysov. Yaakov is uneasy about the plan: besides, if his father should detect the trick, Yaakov will bring upon himself the curse of his angry father rather than any blessing. But she insists that he do as she says and, acknowledging the Divine Spirit of his saintly mother Rivkah, he obeys her command to him.
11. Despite the lack of any real effort on the part of Yaakov to disguise himself, or his voice, or his manner of speech, Yitzchok indeed believes that Aysov has returned quickly and has fulfilled his request. He is pleased that Aysov has shown himself able to harness his world of the hunt for the good, and thus transform it into “the great outdoors with which HaShem has blessed him.” He bestows upon him his further blessings of material wealth and prosperity and superiority which he thinks will be necessary for Aysov in the role he envisages him to have within the future Jewish Nation.
12. Just as Yaakov departs from the presence of his father, Aysov arrives back from his hunting. He prepares a tasty meal as his father had told him and brings it in to his father so that he may bless him. But when Aysov comes in and tells Yitzchok to partake of this meal and to bless him, Yitzchok at once realizes his mistake. He sees how easily he has been deceived just now, and, much worse, how he has allowed himself to be deceived all along by Aysov. All of a sudden, all the wrongdoings of Aysov — which Yitzchok had allowed himself to overlook or to excuse — become clear to him in a flash of stark reality. He realizes how Rivkah has been right in her assessment of Aysov, and

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that he cannot have any part within the Jewish Nation. In a terrible flashback he now sees the utter unsuitability of Aysov as a partner with Yaakov. If he is to have any part to play in the history of the Jewish People, it will be from outside of that People, not as part of it.

13. Aysov beseeches his father to bless him nevertheless, if not as the firstborn and leader, then at least to give him that blessing that he would have bestowed upon Yaakov. But this blessing, Yitzchok explains to him, is a blessing for things spiritual and holy, and of no use or effect upon Aysov. However, Yitzchok, now clear in his vision of the future, bestows upon him a blessing that is suited to Aysov alone — for he shall remain outside of the Jewish Nation.
14. Aysov, now exposed to his father for what he truly was, hated Yaakov for the blessing that his father bestowed upon him. Outwardly, he made light of the episode, but in his heart he comforted himself with the thought of killing Yaakov his brother just as soon as his father is dead.
15. Rivkah, again guided by Divine Inspiration, tells Yaakov to flee to Lovvon her brother, to Chorrion, until Aysov's anger has abated. But to Yitzchok she explains only that she wishes Yaakov to go away, back to her country of the Land of the Two Rivers, to marry someone from there for she cannot bear to live if Yaakov too should marry of the daughters of the Chittites as has Aysov.
16. Yitzchok summons Yaakov and commands him to go to Lovvon — as Rivkah has said — and he blesses him again wholeheartedly with the blessings of the House of Avrohom. With these blessings upon him, Yaakov departs from the house of his father and mother to make his way in the world.

**For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra תולדות please go to HAFTORAS.**