

## Toldot 5774

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

“And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham-Avraham begot Yitzchak” (25:19). Rashi comments “After HaKadosh Baruch-Hu called him Avraham (changing his name from Avram to Avraham by adding a *hey* to his name) he begot Yitzchak.

Apparently it is important to know that only after his name was changed to Avraham, that

Yitzchak was born. Furthermore, the Gemara comments (Berachot 13a): Whoever refers to Avraham as Avram is in violation of a Mitzvat Aseh for it says “Your name shall be Avraham” as well as a Lo Ta’aseh, for it is written “You shall no longer be called Avram” (17:5). What is the significance of the change of name to the birth of Yitzchak?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that prior to the name change it was assumed that fatherhood and motherhood were natural states. There are instinctual biological drives that are common to man and animal. Animals tend to care for and protect their offspring as do human beings. However, the addition of the letter *hey* to Avram’s name revolutionized the concept of parenthood. A new kind of fatherhood came into the world—a teaching father who transmits a message to his children. The new link between parent and child is a spiritual one.

The Torah considers a child as gift bestowed upon parents by HaShem. Man has no right to demand children for no one is entitled to receive this gift. When a child is born into a family, he does not yet belong entirely to the family. Parents must “re-acquire” the child. This was the purpose of the *Akeida*. Avraham had to show himself worthy of the gift. Similarly, all parents must show that they are deserving of their children. HaShem does not demand of us to bring an *Akeida* but what we have to do is educate the baby, fashion the child to love and do *chesed*, and ultimately, pass on the message of the Mesorah community. The child will then be directed to listen and to absorb “Shema B’ni Musar Avi’cha Ve’ al Titosh Torat Imecha” (Mishlei 1:8)

To fashion and to mold the character of a child is tantamount to creating a child and that is, following the way of G-d, “VeHalachta Bid’rachav” (Devarim 28:9). For Avraham to accomplish that he needed the *hey* in his name. When HaShem created the heaven and earth the Torah utilizes the word “*Be’Hi’baram*” (Beraishit 2:4), with an extra *hey* inserted. Says the Midrash Rabbah (12:10) “He created them with the letter *hey* (*b’ hey baram*). The *hey* was chosen because this world resembles that

letter, that is, closed on three sides and open on the fourth. Whoever wishes to stray from the right path may do so and descend into the depths, through the opening in the bottom: but whoever wishes to repent and return may re-enter through the small opening left for him on the side..

That is the charge and responsibility of every Jewish parent. To fulfill the Mitzvah of “Pru U’revu” one must be more than a biological parent, but also, a Teaching Parent.