



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF **RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l**

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Why Did Yitzchak Have to Pray?

וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' וַתֵּהָר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ (בראשית כה, כא)

Hashem responded to his copious prayers, and his wife Rivkah conceived. (Bereishis 25:21)

It doesn't say that *Hashem* "listened" to him or "answered" him; it says וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה', implying that *Hashem* hardly answered Yitzchak's prayers. *Hashem* was saying to him, so to speak: Since you asked for it so much, I must grant your request.

Why was *Hashem* so reluctant to give Yitzchak what he was asking for? *Hashem* had already promised that the Jewish people will come from Yitzchak. Why did He wait until so many prayers had been offered before fulfilling His promise?

תִּקְבֹּר בְּשִׂיבָה טוֹבָה – You [Avraham] will be buried in good old age.¹

Rashi explains that Yishmael will do *teshuvah* in Avraham's lifetime, and Eisav will not go off the *derech* in Avraham's lifetime, so Avraham will be

buried in "good" old age; consequently, Avraham passed away five years early, on the very day that Eisav went off the *derech*.

So in order for Avraham to live out all his days, Eisav would need to have been born five years later than he was. And for this very reason, *Hashem* wished to extend Yitzchak's childlessness for an extra five years, in order to delay Eisav's birth. But since Yitzchak *davened* so much for children, *Hashem* responded to his copious prayers.

When this insight was said over before R. Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, he immediately commented that the words וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' have the exact *gematriya* of חמש שנים, "five years." They both equal 748.

And when this *gematriya* was said over before R. Aharon Kotler, he was very impressed, and remarked that it must have been said through *ruach hakodesh*. ●

¹ Bereishis 15:15.

Pray Again. And Again.

וַיַּעֲתָר יִצְחָק לֵה' (בראשית כה, כא)

Yitzchak prayed copiously to Hashem. (Bereishis 25:21)

“Prayed copiously” – He offered many pleading prayers. (Rashi)

What should you do if your prayers are not answered?

If a person sees that he prayed, but was not answered, he should pray again, as it says, “Hope to *Hashem*, be strong and fortify your heart and hope to *Hashem* [again].”¹

There is a difference between a request made to *Hashem* and a request made to a fellow human being. Let’s say we ask something of a person, and he doesn’t grant our request. If we keep on asking him and pleading to him, he will feel bothered and burdened. It is not so with *Hashem*. On the contrary, He wants us to ask again and again, to beg and plead over and over.

Chazal say that *Moshe Rabbeinu* prayed to enter *Eretz Yisrael* 515 times. This number equals the *gematriya* of וְאֶתְחַנֵּן. And early Torah sources say that if he would have continued to plead, *Hashem* would have granted his request.

Why is *Hashem* different from human beings in this respect? Because when we ask something from a human being, our goal is only to get what we are requesting. If he doesn’t grant our request when we ask for it, this is because he doesn’t want to, or is unable to. So what’s to be gained by asking him

again and again, since he doesn’t want to grant our request? If we keep repeating our request, this naturally pushes him to do what he is asked to, although he doesn’t really want to. It makes him feel pressured. Consequently, the more we ask him and plead to him, the more we are going against his will. We are bothering him and burdening him more and more.

Not so with *Hashem*. First of all, as regards our asking Him to grant us something, He surely wants to give us. There is nothing that blocks or limits *Hashem’s* infinite kindness and mercy. His *chesed* is boundless. The only reason we even need to ask for it – which is also the reason why we were lacking it in the first place – is not because *Hashem* didn’t want to give it to us. Rather, it is because He wants us to ask for it so that the request itself will be heard, thus bringing us closer to Him by standing before Him in *avodah* and *tefilah*.

Why were our forefathers barren? Because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* desires the prayers of the *tzaddikim*.²

From the outstart, *Hashem* wants to give us what we ask for. But He wants us to *daven* for it, for our own benefit.

1 *Berachos* 32b.

2 *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Toldos* 110.

לְעִילּוֹי נִשְׁמָת

מִוִּהָרַד מִשְׁחָה בֶּן אֱלִיעֶזֶר הַמְּבוּרְגָה ז"ל

וּמִוִּהָרַד בְּרוּךְ זָאב בֶּן נִפְתָּלִי קְרָאוּס ז"ל

נִדְבַת נְבִידֵיהֶם ~ עֲשֵׂת אֲנִי בְּנֵי וְהַפְּאֵרֶת בְּנֵי אֲבוֹתֵם

Consequently, the more we ask and plead and *daven* and beg, the more *Hashem* loves us and is pleased with us. This is for two reasons. First, because we are facilitating the granting of our request, which is what *Hashem* wanted all along. Second, because

we are drawing closer to *Hashem* and becoming more attached to Him, which is the whole reason why *Hashem* did not grant it to us immediately.

So the more we ask and plead, the more we are fulfilling *Hashem's* holy Will. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

Getting to Know Yitzchak

וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֵי יִצְחָק בֶּן אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת יִצְחָק. (בראשית כה, יט)

These are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham: Avraham begat Yitzchak.
(*Bereishis* 25:19)

So Little is Written About Yitzchak

The three *Avos*, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, are the foundation on which the Jewish people stands. They are the source of our connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And the Torah recounts the stories of the *Avos* at great length.

The conversation of the servants of the *Avos* is finer than the Torah of their descendants.¹

This means that the Torah's accounts of the *Avos*, even of their servants, are the source of myriad *halachos* and other lessons. They teach us basic principles.

Indeed, the Torah says a lot about the lives of Avraham and of Yaakov. But very little is told about Yitzchak. We don't find much on his way of life, his occupation, what he did and what he built.

The *Avos* are the Divine seat (מרכבה).²

We know that Avraham is the seat of the trait of *chesed*, as it says, חסד לאברהם – “Kindness is Avraham's.”³ And Yaakov is the seat of the trait of

Torah, which is the trait of truth, as it says, תתן אמת ליעקב – “Attribute truth to Yaakov.”⁴

What about Yitzchak? He is the seat of the trait of judgment and constraining power, *din* and *gevurah*. This is the trait of *yiras Shamayim*. It says regarding Yitzchak, לי ופחד יצחק היה – “The Fear of Yitzchak came to me.”⁵

Everyone appreciates the trait of *chesed*. We all aspire to do *chesed*. People also appreciate the trait of Yaakov, which is Torah. Our whole connection to *Hashem* comes from Torah.

But what about Yitzchak's trait, which is *din* and *gevurah*, the trait of *yiras Shamayim*? It's not as clear to us what is so exceptional and so lofty about it. Yitzchak's trait is usually considered to be below Avraham's trait of *chesed* and *ahavah*, about which it says אברהם אוהבי – “Avraham loved Me.”⁶

What was Yitzchak's sublime trait and what makes him unique among the *Avos*?

About Yitzchak it is written:

וַיֵּאמְרוּ רְאוּ רָאִינוּ כִּי הָיָה ה' עִמָּךְ – We surely saw that *Hashem* was with you.⁷

1 *Bereishis Rabbah* 60:8.

2 *Ibid* 47:6.

3 *Michah* 7:20.

4 *Ibid*.

5 *Bereishis* 31:42.

6 *Yeshayahu* 41:8.

7 *Bereishis* 26:28.

It says “seeing” about him twice: **רָאוּ רְאִינוּ**. *Tzaddikim* have remarked that in order to “see” Yitzchak, in order to appreciate who he was and what he stood for, you need to look twice. His eminence does not immediately catch the eye. You need to take a good look in order to really “see” him.

The following are places where Yitzchak is mentioned:

There is a section in *Parshas Chayei Sarah* about finding a wife for him. The truth is that Yitzchak himself was not so much in the focus of the story, because the narrative is about Avraham sending his servant Eliezer to look for a wife for Yitzchak. [Aside from a passing mention that Yitzchak went out to the field to pray,] it says there only one thing about Yitzchak doing something:

וַיְבִאֶהָ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלָה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנָּחַם יִצְחָק אִמּוֹ אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ – “He brought here into the tent of his mother Sarah, and took Rivkah, and she became his wife, and he loved her, and Yitzchak was consoled for his mother.”⁸

Later, in our *parshah*, the Torah starts to tell the story of Yaakov and Eisav. Here we see an interesting detail. Rivkah, who is pregnant with twins, is troubled by all the commotion going on in her womb. Rashi explains that when she would pass by the entrances of tents devoted to Torah study, Yaakov would run and move around and try to get out. When she passes by the entrances of tents devoted to idolatry, Eisav would move around and try to get out.

So what does she do? **וַתֵּלֶךְ לְדַרוֹשׁ אֶת ה'** – “She went to ask *Hashem*.” Rivkah did not ask her husband Yitzchak to explain what is going on inside here. Where was Yitzchak then? *Chazal* say he was secluded at home all the time.

We see here and there in the teachings of *Chazal* that Yitzchak had an unsurpassed quality. First, he was the only one of the *Avos* upon whom *Hashem* placed His name while he was still alive.⁹ Second, it

says in the *Gemara* as follows:

In the future, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will hold a banquet for the *tzaddikim* on the day that He will bestow His *chesed* upon the descendants of Yitzchak.¹⁰

This shows that the *Geulah* is associated especially with Yitzchak. What special connection does Yitzchak have to the celebration over the *Geulah* to come?

I am Nothing

As mentioned before, Avraham’s trait was *chesed*. His whole life was marked by excitement over how the entire world is wonderfully full of *Hashem’s chesed*. Avraham showed everyone that the very existence of the world, with its endless details and infinite variety, is but a gracious gift of kindness from *Hashem*. Avraham’s *avodah* focused on resembling *Hashem* by doing *chesed* in the broadest manner possible.

Yitzchak’s trait was *yiras Shamayim*, which means he totally nullified himself before *Hashem’s* overwhelming presence. *Hashem* is everything, and Yitzchak is nothing. Yitzchak’s worldview was to see *Hashem’s* absolute control over His world. To perceive how all the laws of nature, on whose basis the world was created, and according to which it runs, are all based on *yiras Shamayim*.

Chazal say¹¹ that the pillars of the heavens were weak and loose until *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* rebuked them, causing them to solidify and become firm. This signifies that all the basic laws of nature, which seem to us so strong and immutable, are only that way because of the word of *Hashem* that is within them. Everything stands so solid and stable by virtue of *Hashem’s* glorious Majesty. The whole world is permeated by His Divinity; His power energizes and enlivens everything that exists.

This is how Yitzchak saw the world.

⁸ *Ibid* 24:67.

⁹ See *Rashi, Bereishis* 28:13.

¹⁰ *Pesachim* 119b.

¹¹ *Chagigah* 12a.

In order to grasp the relationship between *chesed* and *gevurah*, between the trait of Avraham and that of Yitzchak, let us explore the *avodah* that took place in *Beis Hamikdash*. There, in the place by which all life and blessing enters the world, the *avodah* had two aspects: that of the *Kohanim* and that of the *Levi'im*. This corresponds to the two universal principles of *chesed* and *gevurah*. The *Kohanim* were the trait of *chesed*, as it says, תְּמִידָה וְאוֹרֵיךְ לְאִישׁ חֲסִידֶךָ – “Your *urim* and *tumim* are for the man of Your *chesed*.”¹² The *Levi'im* were the trait of *gevurah*.

The *avodah* was that way because all the flow of plenty that emanates from *Hashem* is called *chesed*. And there is a basic rule that everything that comes from *Hashem* must return to Him. This rule has no exception. Because if something would emanate from *Hashem*, and remain where it is, distanced from Him, there is no greater destruction than that. Distance from *Hashem* is the source of everything bad and evil, as it says, כִּי הִנֵּה רְחֹקֶיךָ יִאֲבֹדוּ וְגו' וְאֲנִי – “Those who are distanced from You will perish... and for me, closeness to G-d is good.”¹³

This is why everything must return to Him. This returning to *Hashem* comes from the trait of *gevurah*, which makes sure that nothing frees itself from *Hashem's* control.

There are various ways to return to *Hashem*, but there are two main ones: either by *hoda'ah*, recognizing and thanking *Hashem*, or by undergoing suffering. *Hoda'ah* works as follows. Let's say you entrust valuables to the care of so and so. As long as so and so admits and recognizes – as long as he is *modeh* – that the valuables belong to you, they are in your control. You only lose control

of them if he is not *modeh*.

The same is true as regards *Hashem*. By *hoda'ah*, by singing to *Hashem* and praising Him, by thanking Him and recognizing that everything comes from Him, we thereby return to Him everything that came to us from Him. Even while we have it, it remains under *Hashem's* control, because of our *hoda'ah*.

The other way for things to return to *Hashem* is if we don't thank and recognize *Hashem*. In such a case, the gift itself needs to go back to Him. This is what suffering is all about. For instance, lack of money or lack of health. If we don't return our money and our health to *Hashem* by thanking Him and praising Him, then it is possible that our money and our health might itself need to return to *Hashem*, leaving poverty and illness in its place, *chas v'shalom*.

So in *Beis Hamikdash*, the place that drew all blessing down into the world, the *Kohanim* and the *Levi'im* needed to work together. The *Kohanim* drew down *Hashem's chesed* by means of the *korbanos*, and the *Levi'im* returned all the blessings to *Hashem* by means of singing praises to Him, thus allowing the blessings to remain with the Jewish people.

These are the two universal principles: *chesed* and *gevurah*. *Chesed* is bringing down the flow of goodness and plenty. *Gevurah* is connecting all that goodness and plenty back up to its Source, which is *Hashem*. And this is how the traits of the two *Avos* relate to one another. Avraham was *chesed*. And Yitzchak was *gevurah*, whose role is to connect everything to *Hashem's* rule, to associate it with Him.

It is thus quite fitting that the Torah says so little about Yitzchak. He was the quintessence of *gevurah*. He saw *Hashem* as everything and himself as nothing, as if he didn't even exist. This stemmed from his unparalleled recognition of *Hashem's* total control, from his ultimate *yiras Shamayim*. ●

¹² Devarim 33:8.

¹³ Tehillim 73:27-28.