

טועמיה - חיים

לחיות עם הזמן בשבת קודש

A Taste of Shabbat – Toledot 5778

By Rav Mordechai Elon (edited and translated by his students)

In his father's name

A disproportional bracha

Our parsha gives us insight into the world of Yitzchak, the unblemished burnt offering (from the akeida) and shows us the differences between each of our forefathers.

Just like his father, Yitzchak plans to move to Egypt due to a famine in Canaan, but God stops him saying

אל תרד מצרימה שכן בארץ אשר אמר אליך.¹

Do not go down to Egypt, stay in the Land I have told you about.

As Rashi explains

שאתה עולה תמימה ואין חוצה לארץ כדאי לך.

As you are an unblemished burnt offering, it is not fitting for you to go abroad.

So Yitzchak stays in the Land, and settles in Gerar. The Torah tells us of the disproportional and seemingly illogical bracha he receives

ויגדל האיש וילך הלוח וגדל עד כי גדל מאד.²

And the man grew more and more until his was very great

We have seen God's blessing given to our other forefathers, but with a rationale behind them. Avraham had no choice but to go down to Egypt due to the famine, but he returned with many possessions. There is a rational basis to his enrichment. Yaakov too escapes Eisav and leaves Penniless, and after then the bracha appears seemingly naturally.

Yitzchak is different, he settles in Gerar, and it is not God who tells him to sow the land. It is not the logical thing to do, the earth is hard and it is a difficult year

(Rashi ibid), God tells him "stay in The Land", he could have founded a start-up or a kollel but instead

ויזרע יצחק בארץ הווא וימצא בשנה ההוא מאה שערים ויברכהו ה'.³

Yitzchak sow the land in that year, with a hundred fold crop, and god blessed him

This was such a huge blessing that people would say

...זבל פרדותיו של יצחק, ולא כספו וזהבו של אבימלך.⁴

rather the manure of Isaac's mules than Abimelech's silver and gold (Rashi ibid).

In the merit of the fathers

If all this is so, there arises an interesting question: why, when God appears to Yitzchak, does he give the reason for the bracha to be Avraham, and not Yitzchak himself?

גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עמך ואברכה כי לך ולזרעך אתן את כל הארצות האל והקמתל את השבעה אשר נשבעתי לאברהם אביך. והרביתי את זרעך ככוכבי השמים ונתתי לזרעך את כל הארצות האל והתברכו בזרעך כל גווי הארץ. לעקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי וישמר משמרת מצותי חקותי ותורת⁵.

Stay in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you, for to you and to your seed will I give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham, your father. And I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and I will give your seed all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, Because Abraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My instructions.

All that happened was because of the merit of Avraham who kept "My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My instructions". Why when God blessed

¹ בראשית כ"ו, ב'.

² שם, י"ג.

³ שם, י"ב.

⁴ רש"י, שם, י"ג.

⁵ שם, ג'ה'.



Avraham, it was in Avraham's merit, when he met Yaakov, the bracha was in Yaakov's merit, but when he blesses Yitzchak it isn't it his own merit, but in Avraham's, despite the great merit we have seen he held.

Yitzchak's salvation

There are many answers to this question, we will focus on the answer given by Rabbi Ovadia Seforno (1458-1550 Italy). Yitzchak, the unblemished burnt offering, is the only one who can fight for Israel in the heavenly court as our Rabbi's tells us

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For You are our Father; for Abraham knows us not, and Israel does not acknowledge us; You, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer, everlasting is Your name" (Isaiah 63:16). In the future that will surely come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will say to Abraham: Your children have sinned against Me. Abraham will say before Him: Master of the Universe, if so, let them be eradicated to sanctify Your name. God said: I will say it to Jacob. Since he experienced the pain of raising children, perhaps he will ask for mercy on their behalf. He said to Jacob: Your children have sinned. Jacob said before Him: Master of the Universe, if so, let them be eradicated to sanctify Your name. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: There is no reason in elders and no wisdom in youth. Neither Abraham nor Jacob knew how to respond properly. He said to Isaac: Your children have sinned against Me. Isaac said before Him: Master of the Universe, are they my children and not Your children? At Sinai, when they accorded precedence to "We will do" over "We will listen" before You, didn't You call them, "My son, My firstborn son Israel" (Exodus 4:22)? Now that they have sinned, are they my children and not Your children? And furthermore, how much did they actually sin? How long is a person's life? Seventy years. Subtract the first twenty years of his life. One is not punished for sins committed then, as in heavenly matters, a person is only punished from age twenty. Fifty years remain for them. Subtract twenty-five years of nights, and twenty-five years remain for them. Subtract twelve and a half years during which one prays and eats and

uses the bathroom, and twelve and a half years remain for them. If You can endure them all and forgive the sins committed during those years, excellent. And if not, half of the sins are upon me to bear and half upon You. And if You say that all of them, the sins of all twelve and a half years that remain, are upon me, I sacrificed my soul before You and You should forgive them due to my merit. The Jewish people began to say to Isaac: You are our father. Only Isaac defended the Jewish people as a father would and displayed compassion toward his children. Isaac said to them: Before you praise me, praise the Holy One, Blessed be He. And Isaac points to the Holy One, Blessed be He, before their eyes. Immediately they lifted their eyes to the heavens and say: "You, Lord, are our Father, our Redeemer, everlasting is Your name."⁶

When the children will plea for help from their forefathers, neither Avraham or Yaakov will be able to help, only Yitzchak, and because of the Akeida.

To call in God's name

There was still one thing that Avraham and Yaakov had but Yitzchak didn't, and this was why the bracha was in Avraham's merit, as the Seforno tells us -

At this particular stage in Yitzchok's life, G'd did favours to him which were the result of the merits of others, i.e. the merit of his father. This theme is repeated once more in verse 24 when the Torah attributes the promise of the increase in Yitzchok's seed to the merit of Avraham, i.e. בעבור אברהם עבדי "for the sake of My servant Avraham." Neither Yaakov nor Avraham had ever been told that G'd's promises to them was on account of a third party's merit. The reason G'd's promises to Yitzchok had been due to other people's merits was that at that time he had not yet emulated his father's practice of proclaiming the name of G'd, i.e. calling his fellow man to improve their lifestyles and to abandon idolatry. Once Yitzchok had begun to do this we find that even an Avimelech is in awe of him and recognises that he is the recipient of G'd's blessings in his own right⁷.

⁶ שבת פ"ט: translation www.sefaria.org

⁷ פירוש הספורנו בראשית, שם, ה'! www.sefaria.org



Avraham feels responsibility for the world, and spreads God's name in it, Yaacov learns in the Yeshiva of Shem & Eiver "to teach the people", but Yitzchak, despite his lofty spiritual status, until he starts educating and spreading God's name in the world, has to depend on others for his blessings.

The Seforno teaches us that even if one has the high spiritual level of Yitzchak, our holy father, in order to receive a bracha in your own right you must spread the love of God around the world to others .

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