



ISAAC'S LEGACY

Our forefather Abraham introduced the concepts of monotheism and hospitality. Jacob's legacy was the 12 tribes of Israel. But what was Isaac's legacy?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



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Isaac prayed to G-d to heal his wife Rebecca of her barrenness and to bless them with children (Source 7). This begs the question: how did Isaac know that the problem was with Rebecca and not with him? Some suggested that this is because G-d promised Abraham "through Isaac that your seed will be reckoned," and therefore it is certain that Isaac was able to have children. This led him to the conclusion that the problem was with his wife.

But why didn't Isaac fear that sins may have diminished his merits? Jacob feared Esau, despite the Divine promise of protection he had. Isaac was not concerned because he was a "perfect sacrifice," and he knew that G-d was protecting him from sin.

This is also reflected in the blessings that Isaac gave to Jacob. Since he was a "perfect sacrifice," G-d protected him so that he would make the right decision, and give the blessings to the right person.

Introduction

When we examine the lives and legacies of our forefathers, we see that Abraham bequeathed to the world the belief in one G-d and the importance of hospitality, and that Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. But what is Isaac's legacy?

In this lesson, we will focus on Isaac's life and legacy, and discover its relevance to our personal lives.

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תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ח, חלק א', ע' 516.

A. A Supernatural Birth

>> The Rebbe

Student's The birth of Isaac (“through Isaac your seed will be reckoned”) mentioned at the beginning of this week’s Torah portion—“these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac”—was a supernatural occurrence. The difference between Isaac and Ishmael is thus evident in the manner of their birth, even before they grew up.

pg. 3

לידתו של יצחק (“כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע”) - אודותיה נזכר בהתחלת פרשתנו: “ואלה תולדות יצחק בן אברהם אברהם הוליד את יצחק” - הייתה באופן שלמעלה מהטבע. ובזה מודגש החילוק שבין יצחק לישמעאל - באופן לידתם (עוד לפני שגדלו).

Ishmael’s Birth

Source 1 Genesis 16:1-3, 15-16

Student's Sarai, Abram’s wife, had not borne any children to him, and she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the L-rd has prevented me from bearing children; please come to my maidservant; perhaps I will be built up from her.” Abram hearkened to Sarai’s voice. So Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maidservant, at the end of ten years of Abram’s dwelling in the land of Canaan, and she gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.

pg. 3

Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram named his son, whom Hagar had borne, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

וְשָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם לֹא יָלְדָה לוֹ וְלֵה שִׁפְחָה מִצְרִית וְשָׂמָה הָגָר. וְתֹאמַר שָׂרִי אֶל אַבְרָם הִנֵּה נָא עֲצָרְנִי ה' מִלְּדוֹת, בֹּא נָא אֵל שִׁפְחָתִי, אוֹלִי אֲבָנָה מִמֶּנָּה, וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרִי. וַתִּקַּח שָׂרִי אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם אֶת הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית שִׁפְחָתָהּ מִקֶּץ עֶשְׂרֵי שָׁנִים לְשִׁבְתֵּי אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן, וַתִּתֵּן אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָם אִשָּׁה לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה.

וַתֵּלֶד הָגָר לְאַבְרָם בֶּן, וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָם שֵׁם בְּנוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה הָגָר: יִשְׁמָעֵאל. וְאַבְרָם בֶּן שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים, בְּלִדַת הָגָר אֶת יִשְׁמָעֵאל לְאַבְרָם.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Ishmael's birth was a natural event.
pg. 4 Not only from Hagar's end, but also from Abraham's—he was 86 years old at the time, and no special miracle was required for him to be able to father a child. We do find mention in the Torah that an angel blessed Hagar that she will become pregnant and give birth, and there was also a blessing given later to Ishmael, but nowhere do we see anything supernatural.

לידת ישמעאל הייתה בדרך הטבע - לא רק מצד הָגָר, אלא אפילו מצד אברהם, שהיה בן שמונים ושש שנה בלדת הָגָר את ישמעאל², ולא היה צורך בנס מיוחד שיוכל להוליד. - מצינו אמנם ברכה של המלאך להגֵר: "הנך הרה ויולדת בן גו"³ וכן לאחרי כן הייתה הברכה "ולישמעאל שמעתך וגו"⁴, אבל לא מצינו ענין שלמעלה מדרך הטבע.

The story of the birth of Ishmael, Isaac's paternal half-brother, began when Sarah saw that she was unable to give birth. She suggested that Abraham marry Hagar in order that she should have a child for him, in the hope that this step would lead - in Sarah's words - to "perhaps I will be built up from her."

Obviously, Sarah's choice of Hagar was based on the assumption that Hagar was fit to give birth naturally. There is no doubt that this would not have happened if Hagar was also an older woman who herself needed a miracle to give birth. It is also clear that Abraham was still fit to bear children at his age. Had this not been the case, Sarah would not have convinced him to enter into this adventure of a marriage

Source 2 Genesis 18:10-12

Student's The angel said, "I will surely return to you at this
pg. 4 time next year, and behold, your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah heard this from the entrance of the tent, behind Abraham. Abraham and Sarah were old, coming on in years, and Sarah was postmenopause. Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become worn out, will I have smooth flesh? And also, my husband is old."

ויאמר: שׁוֹב אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ פֶּעַת חֵזָה וְהִנֵּה בֶן לְשָׂרָה אֲשֶׁתְּךָ, וְשָׂרָה שֹׁמֵעַת פֶּתַח הָאֵהָל וְהוּא אֲחֵרִיו. וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה זָקְנִים בָּאִים בְּיָמִים, חֲדָל לְהִיּוֹת לְשָׂרָה אֲרַח כְּנָשִׁים. וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ לֵאמֹר: אֲחֵרִי בְלִתִּי הִיְתָה לִי עֲדָנָה וְאֲדֹנָי זָקֵן.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Isaac's birth was miraculous from all
pg. 4 angles - both from Abraham's end, as well as Sarah's. This is reflected in the verses where Sarah expresses her great wonder upon hearing from the angel the news that she would give birth.

מה שאין כן בנוגע ללידת יצחק
- הרי כל הענין לא היה אלא בדרך
נס, הן מצד שרה והן מצד אברהם,
כמסופר בפשטות הכתובים⁵ אודות
גודל תמיהתה של שרה בשמעה מפי
המלאך את הבשורה אודות לידת
יצחק⁶.

When we read about Sarah and Abraham's reaction to the news that they would give birth to a child, we understand that in their eyes it was something that defied nature. This was from Sarah's side, because she was old and barren, as well as Abraham's side, "my husband is old."

Thus we see that Isaac's life already began in an unnatural manner.

⁵ וירא יח, יב.

⁶ ראה גם שיחת ש"פ חיי שרה סי"ט.

B. A Supernatural Circumcision

Source 3 Genesis 17:23-25

Ishmael Was Circumcised At Thirteen Years Old

Student's Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those
pg. 5 born in his house and all those purchased with his money, every male of Abraham's household, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very day, as G-d had spoken with him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised of the flesh of his foreskin. Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised of the flesh of his foreskin.

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ
וְאֵת כָּל יְלֵדֵי בֵיתוֹ וְאֵת כָּל
מִקְנֵת כֶּסֶפוֹ, כָּל זָכָר בְּאִנְשֵׁי בֵית
אַבְרָהָם, וַיְמַל אֶת בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתָם
בַּעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
אֱתוֹ אֱלֹקִים. וְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים
וְתִשְׁעֵ שָׁנָה, בְּהַמְלֹו בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ.
וַיִּשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ בֶן שְׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂרָה
שָׁנָה בְּהַמְלֹו אֶת בָּשָׂר עֲרֻלָּתוֹ.

Source 4 Genesis 21:1-4

Isaac Was Circumcised At Eight Days

Student's The L-rd remembered Sarah as He had said, and
pg. 5 the L-rd did to Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time of which G-d had spoken to him. Abraham named his son who had been born to him, whom Sarah had borne to him, Isaac. Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as G-d had commanded him.

וְה' פָקַד אֶת שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר,
וַיַּעַשׂ ה' לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר. וַתֵּהָרֵר
וַתֵּלֵד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם בֶּן לְזִקְנָיו,
לְמוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱתוֹ אֱלֹקִים.
וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם אֶת שֵׁם בְּנוֹ הַנּוֹלָד
לֹא אֲשֶׁר יֵלְדָה לוֹ שָׂרָה, יִצְחָק.
וַיְמַל אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן
שְׁמֹנֶת יָמִים, כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה אֱתוֹ
אֱלֹקִים:

>> The Rebbe

Student's We find a similar difference between
pg. 6 Isaac and Ishmael concerning their
circumcision. Ishmael was circumcised
at thirteen years old, while Isaac was
circumcised at eight days old.

Circumcision entails a degree of danger,
and Maimonides emphasizes that
preserving life overrides everything, and
that "circumcision can always be done
later, but a life can never be returned."

The danger of circumcision is certainly
greater at eight days old. When explaining
the reason for this commandment in his
Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides
mentions that "a child is very weak when
born...until seven days have passed." The
older the child is, the better equipped
he is to handle the pain of circumcision.
For this reason, there are a number of
instructions concerning caring for the
health of a baby undergoing circumcision.

חילוק זה מצינו גם בנוגע לענין
המילה⁷ - שישמעאל נימול בהיותו
בן שלש עשרה שנה⁸, ויצחק נימול
בהיותו בן שמונת ימים⁹:

"מילה - סכנת נפש היא"¹⁰.
ולכן, בנוגע למצות מילה מדגיש
הרמב"ם¹¹ "סכנת נפשות דוחה את
הכל", ומוסיף: "ואפשר למול לאחר
זמן, ואי אפשר להחזיר נפש אחת
מישראל לעולם"¹².

ומובן, שבגיל שמונה ימים הסכנה
היא גדולה יותר - שבטעם מצות
מילה לשמונה ימים כותב הרמב"ם
במורה נבוכים¹³ ש"כשילוד הוא
חלוש מאד בתכלית... עד סוף שבעה
ימים", ומכיון שכן, שככל שיגדל
יותר - נתחזק כחו יותר לסבול את
ענין המילה. ולכן, גם בנוגע ליום
השמיני ישנם כמה וכמה עניני
זהירות בנוגע לבריאות הגוף של
התינוק כו'.

Source 5 Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 16

Student's Rabbi Yosei stated: See how beloved the
pg. 6 commandment of circumcision is, that it
supersedes even the Shabbat. As it is written,
"and on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin
shall be circumcised" (Leviticus 12:3) - meaning
even on the Shabbat. And since circumcision
endangers life, one is permitted to heal it on the
Shabbat.

אמר רבי יוסי, ראה כמה חביבה
מצות מילה שהיא דוחה את
השבת, דכתיב: "וביום השמיני
ימול" (ויקרא יב, ג), אפלו
בשבת. ומילה - סכנת נפש היא,
לפיכך התר לרפאתה בשבת.

(11) הל' מילה ספ"א.
(12) ראה לקו"ש ח"ה ע' 146 הע' 32.
(13) ח"ג פמ"ט (קרוב לסופו).

(7) ראה גם לקו"ש ח"א ע' 19 ואילך.
(8) לך לך יז, כה.
(9) וירא כא, ד.
(10) תנחומא לך לך טז.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Isaac's circumcision at eight days is
^{pg. 7} therefore "miraculous," beyond nature, when contrasted with Ishmael's circumcision at age thirteen.

ונמצא, שפעולת המילה בגיל שמונת ימים, כפי שהיה אצל יצחק, היא באופן של נס - למעלה מדרך הטבע - ביחס לפעולת המילה בגיל שלוש עשרה שנה, כפי שהיה אצל ישמעאל.

Circumcision is a medical procedure that may, in certain cases, put a person in a life-endangering situation. It is therefore permissible to perform various medical procedures on Shabbat in order to heal the wound, and the slightest medical concern warrants postponing the circumcision. From a purely medical standpoint, it is clear that at the age of thirteen, the medical procedure of circumcision is much safer (while it is more painful at an older age, the medical risk is smaller).

Thus we see that in addition to his birth in a supernatural manner, Isaac was also circumcised at the age of eight days - a manner which is "above nature".

C. Living Beyond Nature

>> The Rebbe

Student's Isaac's conduct throughout his entire life was supernatural. As a "complete sacrifice" he never left the Land of Israel, as Rashi comments on the verse "do not descend to Egypt, reside in this land," "you are a complete sacrifice, and the world outside of Israel is unfit for you." The spiritual meaning of this is Divine service that is beyond the limitations of the world, supernatural.

וכמו כן הייתה כללות הנהגתו של יצחק במשך כל ימי חייו באופן שלמעלה מהטבע - שהרי יצחק היה "עולה תמימה" ולכן, במשך כל ימיו לא יצא מארץ ישראל, כמו שכתוב בפירוש רש"י על הפסוק¹⁴ "אל תרד מצרימה גור בארץ הזאת": "אתה עולה תמימה, אין חוצה לארץ כדאי לך", וענינו בעבודה הרוחנית - עבודה באופן שלמעלה ממציאות העולם, למעלה מהטבע.

Source 6 Genesis 26:1-3

Student's There was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that had been in the days of Abraham. Isaac went to Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, to Gerar. G-d appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; reside in the land that I will tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you, for to you and to your descendants will I give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to your father Abraham.

וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ מִלְכָּד הָרָעַב הָרֵאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם, וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים גֵּרָרָה. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהֵי ה' וַיֹּאמֶר: אֵל תֵּרַד מִצְרִימָה, שְׁכֹן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ. גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת, וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאַבְרַכְךָ, כִּי לָךְ וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ אֶתֹן אֵת כָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת הָאֵל, וְהִקְמֹתִי אֵת הַשְּׂבָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ.

רש"י

Rashi

Do not go down to Egypt: Jacob was planning on going down to Egypt, as his father had done in a period of famine. G-d therefore said to him, "do not go down to Egypt," because you are like a complete sacrifice, and being outside of Israel is unfit for you.

אל תרד מצרימה. שהיה דעתו לרדת מצרימה, כמו שירד אביו בימי הרעב; אמר לו: אל תרד מצרימה, שאתה עולה תמימה, ואין חוצה לארץ כדאי לך.

When there is famine, or some other danger in a certain country, people get up and go somewhere else. This is how Abraham and Jacob behaved when there was a famine in the land of Canaan, and this is how people behave today - refugees and migrant workers exist all over the world.

But G-d outlined a supernatural path for Isaac. G-d revealed himself to him and told him that he was a "perfect sacrifice," and therefore, regardless of what happens in the country, he must remain there, in the Holy Land. Again, living without taking into consideration the natural occurrences of the world.

Isaac's life "above nature" was not limited to just birth and circumcision, he lived his entire life in a supernatural way.

>> The Rebbe

Isaac's Uniqueness - Above Nature

Student's It is known that each of the patriarchs
pg. 9 had a unique, novel, feature which they bequeathed to all of the Jewish people. Isaac's novel feature was supernatural conduct.

Regarding circumcision, Isaac was the first to be circumcised at eight days (Abraham was circumcised at 99 years old). And regarding being a "complete sacrifice": Abraham spent many years outside of Israel, having only moved there at age 75. Jacob spent twenty years in Laban's home, etc. Isaac was the only one of the patriarchs who never left Israel, a "pure sacrifice."

As a result, the supernatural mode of conduct is not novel for the Jewish people - we inherited it from Isaac.

והנה, ידוע שאצל כל אחד מהאבות היה חידוש מיוחד, וממנו נמשך הדבר לכל בני ישראל. וחידושו המיוחד של יצחק - הנהגה שלמעלה מהטבע:

בנוגע לענין המילה - הרי יצחק "התחיל במילה תחילה לשמונה"¹⁵ (שהרי אברהם אבינו נימול בהיותו בן תשעים ותשע שנה¹⁶). ובנוגע לענין של "עולה תמימה" - הרי: אברהם היה ריבוי שנים בחוץ לארץ, שכן, רק בהיותו בן שבעים וחמש יצא מחרן¹⁷ וכו'. יעקב אבינו היה עשרים שנה בבית לבן¹⁸ וכו'. ואילו יצחק - הוא היחידי מכל האבות שמעולם לא יצא מארץ ישראל, "עולה תמימה".

ומכל זה מובן - כאמור - שכללות הנהגה באופן שלמעלה מדרך הטבע אינה בבחינת חידוש אצל בני ישראל, מכיון שמקבלים זאת בירושה מעבודתו של יצחק.

מרשימה (מוגהת) של דברי כ"ק אדמו"ר בעת ביקור הרבנים בני האדמו"ר מלעלוב. תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ה חלק א' ע' 682.

(17) שם יב, ד.
(18) ויצא לא, מא.

(15) תנחומא שמות ד. וראה לקו"ש וירא תשד"מ הערות 2-11. וש"נ.
(16) לך לך שם, כד.

Thus, we learn from Isaac, that the supernatural way of life is something innate to the Jewish people. This is true on two levels: We observe mitzvot for G-d without consideration for the limitations of nature, and G-d, on his end, preserves and protects us in a manner that is above nature.

The commandment of circumcision illustrates the special and suprarational commitment Jews have to G-d. Circumcision seems to be one of the more difficult commandments to understand and perform, yet the absolute majority of the Jewish people observe it according to the law. This expresses the “supernatural” within every Jew.

On the other end, G-d cares for and protects the Jewish people in a way that is also above nature.

Following is a special story that expresses G-d’s concern for the Jew, even to the extent of going above nature:

A Story

In 1957, Rabbi Meshulom Weiss and his bride-to-be Elaine, were about to get married. Before the wedding, they had a private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The following is his account:

When we went to see the Rebbe for a blessing a few days before our wedding, she started to cry and asked that I leave the room so she could speak to the Rebbe alone. Puzzled, I complied.

After twenty minutes, she came out no longer crying, and she said nothing to me about it until after we were married. Then she confessed, “I hope that you won’t be upset about what I told the Rebbe. I had wanted to call the wedding off because I am very impatient and have a bad temper; I feared that my temperament made me unsuitable to be a wife and mother. I told the Rebbe that I would rather not get married than to get married only to get divorced. But the Rebbe just smiled at me and said, ‘G-d will bless you with many children, and these children will teach you patience. Meanwhile, do volunteer work – preferably in a hospital with children – and you will find your patience growing. But don’t call off the wedding.’”

Having the Rebbe’s promise of many children, we looked forward to starting our family, but months came and went, and my wife – who was eighteen at the time we got married – did not get pregnant. When we sought the advice of a gynecologist, she was informed that she had an undeveloped womb – what is

called an “infantile uterus” – which meant she could not bear children. My wife was absolutely devastated to hear this, so we went to get a second opinion and a third opinion, both of which only confirmed the first.

Then we called New York and reported this news to the Rebbe. His response was to reiterate the promise of many children and to give us a blessing. A month later my wife became pregnant with our first child, a boy whom we named Mordechai. And as it turned out, he was the first of fifteen!

After our sixth or seventh child was born, the doctor called me in and said, “Listen, your wife is having a child every year. This is not good for her body. You must give her a rest.” He scared the daylight out of me. I came home and reported this to my wife, who said, “Let’s consult a rabbi. We need to know the opinion of Jewish law in a case such as ours.”

The rabbi we consulted ruled that, if the doctor said my wife’s life was in danger, we had to listen to him and take a break from having children. Maybe have no more kids at all.

We accepted that decision, but shortly thereafter we had an opportunity to be in New York, and my wife decided to pose this question to the Rebbe. She told him about the doctor’s opinion and the rabbi’s opinion. She also said, “Despite these opinions, I don’t want to stop having children. But my husband has been scared by the doctor and he fears something might happen to me.”

Hearing that, the Rebbe called me in and said, “Meshulom, don’t mix in G-d’s business. If your wife is not supposed to have any more children, she won’t. And if she is, she will. It’s not up to you.”

Even though the Rebbe usually referred people to a rabbinic authority in such situations, he made an exception in our case. With that we continued and had a total of fifteen beautiful children, thank G-d, each of whom is a tremendous blessing.

But there is a postscript to the story.

Years later, when my wife was older, she went to see a gynecologist again. He examined her and said, “You must be very disappointed – as a religious woman,

you undoubtedly wanted many children, but with your infantile uterus you obviously never could have any.”

My wife said nothing, but she went out the door laughing. When she came home and told me about it, we had a good laugh together. And I said to her, “All those doctors could not have been wrong. But something amazing happened. The Rebbe promised you that you would have many children and gave you a blessing. Without the Rebbe’s blessing, without his advice and foresight, none of our children would be here!”

(Interview of Rabbi Meshulom Weiss to JEM)

D. Divine Protection

In another talk, the Rebbe emphasizes another point in Yitzchak's life: he was safeguarded from sin.

Source 7 Genesis 25:20-21

Student's Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebecca
pg. 10 the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Padan
Aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, as wife
for himself. Isaac prayed to the L-rd opposite
his wife because she was barren, and the L-rd
accepted his prayer, and his wife Rebecca
conceived.

וַיְהִי יִצְחָק בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה
בְּקָחָתוֹ אֶת רֵבֶקָה בַּת בְּתוּאֵל
הָאֲרָמִי מִפְּדוֹן אָרָם, אָחוֹת לְבֶן
הָאֲרָמִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה. וַיַּעֲתֶר יִצְחָק
לֵה' לְנַכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הוּא,
וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' וַתֵּהָר רֵבֶקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ.

>> The Rebbe

Why Didn't Isaac Pray For Himself?

Student's The verse states "Isaac prayed to the L-rd
pg. 10 opposite his wife because she was barren." This
begs the question, how did Isaac know that the
issue was with Rebecca, "she was barren," and
not perhaps with him?

Some suggested an answer to this question, that since G-d had promised Abraham "it is through Isaac that your seed will be reckoned," it cannot be that he should have anything holding him back in this regard. As a result, the issue must be with Rebecca, "she was barren."

"ויעתר יצחק לה' לנוכח אשתו כי עקרה היא"¹⁹: לכאורה אינו מובן: מניין ידע יצחק שהחיסרון הוא אצל רבקה, "כי עקרה היא", ולא אצלו, שאינו יכול להוליד?

רצו לתרץ, בפשטות, שמכיון שהקב"ה הבטיח לאברהם "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע"²⁰, ברור הדבר ללא כל ספק שמצדו אין מניעה בדבר, ועל כן צריך לומר ש"עקרה היא"

The Rebbe would often encourage the public to comment and ask questions about what was said at the farbrengens (public gatherings), and publish them in a special booklet of 'Ha'aros' (comments and remarks), which was published every few weeks. Over time, after people got used to the Rebbe discussing Rashi's interpretation of the weekly Parsha, the Rebbe encouraged them to review the weekly Parsha ahead of time and offer questions and insights on Rashi's words. From time to time the

Rebbe referred, in his talks, to the comments and questions published in the booklet. In this talk, the Rebbe quotes a question from this publication, as well as the answer offered by the writer. The Rebbe questions the answer, and then proceeds to offer a more complete explanation.

Prayer Is Still Required

Student's But this answer is insufficient. We have
pg. 11 said many times regarding questions raised on Rashi's commentary that we need to carefully examine the matter to see if we can come up with an answer. The same applies to the answers to these questions, after coming up with a possible answer we need to carefully examine it to determine whether it is satisfactory. In this case, brief consideration leads to the conclusion that this answer isn't satisfactory.

Jacob was promised by G-d that He would protect him. As Jacob repeated G-d's promise, "You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed as numerous as the sand of the sea.'" Nevertheless, Jacob prayed to G-d for the fulfillment of the promise, expressing concern that perhaps he had since been tainted by sin and rendered unworthy.

Source 8 Genesis 32:11-12

Student's I have become small from all the kindnesses and
pg. 11 from all the truth that You have rendered Your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me, and strike a mother with children.

אמנם, אף שתירוץ זה פשוט לכאורה, הרי (הרבי חייך ואמר:) כשם שדובר כמה פעמים בנוגע לשאלות בפירושי רש"י, שכאשר מוצאים שאלה וקושיה, יש לעיין ולהתבונן שמא יכולים למצוא תירוץ, כן הוא גם בנוגע למציאת תירוץ, שגם כאשר מוצאים תירוץ בהשקפה ראשונה, יש לעיין ולהתבונן האם זה אמנם תירוץ מספיק כו', ובנדון דידן, גם בהתבוננות קלה מגיעים למסקנה שאין זה תירוץ מספיק -

כי: מצינו אצל יעקב, שאף שהקב"ה הבטיח לו שישמור עליו כו', ובלשונו של יעקב בתפלתו: "ואתה אמרת היטב איטיב עמך ושמתי את זרעך כחול הים גו"²¹ - מכל מקום, ביקש והתפלל על קיום ההבטחה, באמרו, "אני ירא שמא משהבטחתי נתלכלכתי בחטא"²².

קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֲמֶת
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת עַבְדְּךָ, כִּי בְּמִקְלִי
עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה
הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת. הַצִּילֵנִי נָא
מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי יָרָא אֶנְכִּי
אֲתוֹ פֶּן יָבֹוא וְהִכְנִי אִם עַל בָּנָיִם.

הרי, נוסף לכך שהחשש שמא יגרום החטא היא סברה פשוטה, תתעורר אצלו השאלה והקושיה כשיבוא ללמוד פסוק זה.

21) בראשית לב, יג.
22) פרש"י שם.יא. - ואף שהבן חמש למקרא לא למד עדיין פסוק זה,

Rashi

רע"י

Student's
pg. 12

I have become small: My merits have diminished because of the kindnesses and the truth that You have rendered me. Therefore, I fear lest I have become tainted with sin since the time that You promised me, and it will cause me to be delivered into Esau's hands.

קטַנְתִּי מִכֵּל הַחֲסָדִים.
נִתְמַעְטוּ זְכוּתֵי עַל יְדֵי
הַחֲסָדִים וְהַאֲמַת שְׁעֵשִׂית
עָמִי, לְכֵן אֲנִי יָרָא, שְׁמָא
מִשְׁהַבְּטַחְתָּנִי נִתְקַלְקַלְתִּי
בְּחַטָּא וַיְגַרֵם לִי לְהִמָּסֵר בְּיַד
עֵשָׂו (שבת ל"ב):

In the well-known story about Jacob and Esau, in which Esau wanted to kill Jacob because he had "stolen" the blessings intended for him, we read that Jacob prayed to G-d to save him, even though G-d had already promised him a long and healthy life. Rashi explains that Jacob was afraid that "his merits have diminished," that is, that G-d's promise was conditional on Jacob's righteous deeds. If so, the fact that Abraham received a promise of children - "for in Isaac will be called your seed" - is not a guarantee that this will actually happen. He still had to pray that the blessing would materialize!

>> The Rebbe

Student's
pg. 12

Therefore, even though G-d had promised that "it is through Isaac that your seed will be reckoned," it is possible that sin had caused a change, G-d forbid. It was therefore necessary to pray to G-d on behalf of Isaac as well. This reinstates our question - why did Isaac only pray for Rebecca, "because she was barren"?

ועל פי זה, אף שהקב"ה הבטיח "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע", הרי, מכיון שישנו החשש שמא גרם החטא, יתכן שנעשה שינוי, חס ושלום, בענין זה, ובמילא, יש מקום וצורך בתפלה ובקשה גם בנוגע ליצחק, וחוזרת הקושיה למקומה: מדוע התפלל רק על רבקה, "כי עקרה היא"?

No Concern For Sin

The answer is that Isaac was certain that the promise "it is through Isaac that your seed will be reckoned" would be fulfilled, because there was no room for concern that sin had interfered.

אין חשש מחטא

התשובה היא: בנוגע לעצמו - היה יצחק בטוח שתקוים ההבטחה "כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע", מכיון שאצלו לא היה מקום לחשש שמא יגרם החטא.

Jacob had to pray for protection despite G-d's promise, because sin could have voided the promise. Why was there no such concern for Isaac?

Student's The reason Isaac had no room for concern is because, as Rashi writes, "Isaac didn't want to take a maidservant as a second wife, as Abraham had, because he had been sanctified on Mt. Moriah as a perfect sacrifice."
pg. 12

וההסברה בזה: בהמשך הענין כותב רש"י²³ ש"שפחה לא רצה לישא (כמו אברהם), לפי שנתקדש בהר המוריה להיות עולה תמימה".

Source 9 Rashi, Genesis 25:26

Student's **Sixty years old:** Ten years since he had married her...and the following ten years he had waited for her, as his father had done for Sarah. Since she did not conceive, he knew that she was barren, and he prayed for her. But Isaac did not wish to take a maidservant, as Abraham had done, because he had been sanctified on Mount Moriah to be a perfect sacrifice.
pg. 13

בן ששים שנה. י' שנים משנשאה... וי' שנים הללו צפה והמתין לה, כמו שעשה אביו לשרה; כיון שלא נתעברה, ידע שהיא עקרה, והתפלל עליה (יבמות ס"ד). ושפחה לא רצה לישא, לפי שנתקדש בהר המוריה להיות עולה תמימה.

>> The Rebbe

Student's We find this point reiterated later in the Torah portion. The verse states, "and there was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that had been in the days of Abraham, and Isaac went to Abimelech the king of the Philistines, to Gerar. And the L-rd appeared to him, and said, "Do not go down to Egypt." Rashi explains, "Isaac had considered going down to Egypt like his father had done during a famine. G-d therefore appeared to Isaac and told him not to descend to Egypt because 'you are a perfect sacrifice, and the world outside Israel is unfit for you.'"
pg. 13

ועל דרך זה בענין שלאחרי זה²⁴ "ויהי רעב בארץ מלבד הרעב הראשון אשר היה בימי אברהם וילך יצחק אל אבימלך מלך פלשתים גררה", "וירא אליו ה' ויאמר אל תרד מצרימה גו", ומפרש רש"י: "שהיה דעתו לרדת למצרים כמו שירד אביו בימי הרעב²⁵, אמר לו, אל תרד מצרימה, שאתה עולה תמימה ואין חוצה לארץ כדאי לך".

כדי לבאר מדוע הוצרך הקב"ה לומר לו "אל תרד מצרימה" – מכיון "שהיה בדעתו לרדת למצרים כמו שירד אביו בימי הרעב".

23 כה, כו.

24 כו, א-ב.

25 ולכן מזכיר הכתוב אודות "הרעב הראשון אשר היה בימי אברהם".

Isaac acted supernaturally during two critical moments in his life: (a) when he saw that his wife was barren he didn't take a maidservant in order to bear children, and (b) when there was a famine in Israel he didn't descend to Egypt. Why? Because he was a "complete sacrifice." What is a "complete sacrifice"?

Student's
pg. 13

The unique aspect of a "perfect sacrifice" is that it is guarded so that nothing undesirable happens to it. It follows that since Isaac was termed a "perfect sacrifice," G-d certainly protected him from any possible sin G-d forbid. As a result, there was no room for concern that sin would interfere.

והנה, המעלה המיוחדת של "עולה תמימה" היא - ששומרים עליה שלא יארע לה דבר בלתי-רצוי. ומזה מובן גם בנוגע ליצחק - שלהיותו "עולה תמימה" - בוודאי שהקב"ה מגן ושומר עליו שלא יבוא לידי חטא, חס ושלום, ובמילא, אין מקום לחשש שמא יגרום החטא.

When Abraham bound his son Isaac on the altar, Isaac entered a unique category - a "complete sacrifice." He was now expected to behave differently. He was required to remain absolutely holy even when it meant going against nature: not to marry a maidservant for the purposes of procreation, and not to leave the country when there was a famine. But the high expectations also come with advantages. Isaac was protected from above so that he would not sin, like a man who dedicates an animal to be a perfect sacrifice and guards it from getting a blemish that would disqualify it, just as one protects an Etrog with cotton so that it does not get damaged.

Therefore, Isaac did not fear that he would commit a sin, because he knew that he was being watched over from above.

No Mistakes

Student's
pg. 14

Based on the above we can explain another matter in the Torah portion, concerning the blessings that Isaac wished to give to Esau, and eventually gave to Jacob.

When Isaac realized that it was not Esau that he had blessed, he "shuddered a great shudder." One may ask, why did he shudder so greatly just because he blessed someone other than Esau? We can suggest that the shudder was

על פי זה יש להוסיף ולבאר עוד ענין בהמשך הפרשה בנוגע לברכות שרצה יצחק לברך את עשיו, ובסופו של דבר בירך את יעקב:

כשנודע ליצחק שלא בירך את עשיו - אזי "ויחרד יצחק חרדה גדולה עד מאד"²⁶, ובטעם הדבר - כי לכאורה, גם אם בירך מישהו אחר במקום את

Student's because he thought that his status as a “perfect
pg. 14 sacrifice” had been taken from him, G-d forbid. He thought so because G-d hadn't guarded him to ensure he gave the blessings to the son he thought deserved them as the firstborn. He later realized that this wasn't the case, because the blessings actually rightfully belonged to Jacob, and he gave Esau a separate blessing, “you too should be blessed.”

עשיו, מה מקום ל"חרדה גדולה עד מאד"?! - יש לומר²⁷, שהחרדה הייתה מפני שחשב שניטל ממנו, חס ושלום, הענין של "עולה תמימה", והראיה, שלא שמרו עליו מלמעלה שיברך את מי שחשב שצריך לברכו בגלל מעלת הבכורה²⁸ (עד שנתברר לו שהברכות שייכות ליעקב כו', שלכן אמר "גם ברוך יהיה").

Isaac knew he was a “perfect sacrifice” who merits divine protection from making mistakes. When he realized that he had made a mistake and blessed Jacob instead of Esau he “shuddered” with concern that his status had been revoked and he was no longer meriting Divine protection.

But after hearing that Esau had sold his right as firstborn to Jacob, Isaac calmed down. He understood that G-d had indeed protected him and ensured that the blessings reached the right target.

Student's This event actually further underlined Isaac as
pg. 14 a protected “perfect sacrifice,” because he had been guarded that he should give the blessings to the son that truly deserved them, Jacob.

עוד ועיקר: בענין זה גופא מודגש היותו "עולה תמימה" - ששמרו עליו מלמעלה שיברך למי שראוי באמת לקבל את הברכות, יעקב דווקא.

משיחת שבת פרשת תולדות, מברכים החודש כסלו, ה'תשמ"ח, בלתי מוגה. תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ח, חלק א', ע' 516.

In this talk the Rebbe teaches us another amazing point.

When a person is obligated to study the Torah and fulfill mitzvot in a supernatural way, besides for the fact that G-d also takes care of him in a supernatural way, there is another aspect here: G-d keeps him from making mistakes and sinning.

Isaac's life story teaches us that when a person dedicates himself to being a “perfect sacrifice,” and behaves in a supernatural way in order to fulfill G-d's instructions and commandments, he can

על עצם העובדה שלא שומרים אותו מלמעלה כו'.
(28) ע"ד מ"ש (תצא כא, טז-יז) "לא יוכל לבכר את בן האהובה על פני בן השנואה הבכור". "כי את הבכור בן השנואה יכיר גו".

(27) ולהעיר מהפירוש שמביא רש"י מתנחומא [נוסף על הפירוש כתרומה, לשון תמיהה, ומדרשו שראה גיהנום פתוחה כו'], "למה חרד יצחק אמר שמא עון יש בי שברכתי קטן לפני גדול כו", דייל, שבזה נכלל גם החרדה

expect the same treatment from above. He can trust G-d to watch over him and ensure that he makes the right decisions and doesn't fall in sin.

This superior level of safeguarding is not to be taken for granted. Every person's life is full of different struggles, and every person makes thousands of decisions a day, big and small. There is no person who does not fall, and we all want the divine navigation that will guide us through the important intersections of life and help us make the right decisions. But we are human, and yes, we also fail and make mistakes sometimes.

But those who do indeed make the effort to get out of their natural shell, receive enlightenment and inspiration from above, from G-d, to be truly "supernatural."