

THE IYOV CONNECTION

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

And it was after these things that Avraham was told, saying, "Behold, Milcah as well has borne children to Nachor, your brother: Utz, his first-born, Buz, his brother..."

Be'er Mayim Chaim: While we, his more distant relatives, have little natural interest in Nachor's expanding family, Chazal² saw important events in this pasuk. Avraham, they tell us, became fearful of having to endure Divinely-ordered suffering. Hashem told him not to worry. Utz had been born. Otherwise known as Iyov, he would bear the burden of suffering, and spare Avraham.

We would call this puzzling, to say the least. Avraham had just been directly assured by Heaven of a rich berachah in the aftermath of the Akeidah. Why, of all times, would he now dreadfully anticipate Divinely-ordained suffering? And if he had some good reason to fear it, how could Iyov, an innocent stranger, assume that suffering and spare Avraham?

We have to move our focus back a bit to discover the solution to these enigmas. While it was never Hashem's intention that Avraham go through with the offering of his son, Avraham still detected significant meaning in the very instruction, which could not have been arbitrary. Avraham reasoned that Yitzchok was linked to gevurah, including its strongest and harshest forms. The Akeidah, Avraham believed, was meant to bring this gevurah under the absolute dominion of chesed - Avraham's own characteristic. (The Ari HaKadosh explained offerings as a class in this way. The slaughter of a korban would "sweeten" gevurah through an admixture of chesed.)

The Ari also taught that people's neshamos often returned through their own progeny. (This is what the Torah means when it speaks of Hashem visiting the sins of parents upon their children!) Avraham sensed that Yitzchok's neshamah was linked in part to this grandfather Terach, who had ample sins that remained unatoned. (Grandchildren are also reckoned as children in this regard.) When Yitzchok walked away from the Akeidah unscathed, Avraham now had reason to fear that the unpaid spiritual debts of Terach would be collected from himself!

With the news of the birth of Utz, Avraham's fears were allayed. While Terach may have been linked to the neshamos of Yitzchok (and even Avraham), Utz was even closer. Utz/ Iyov was a full gilgul of Terach; his life afforded an opportunity to right the wrongs committed by Avrohom's father. (Initially Iyov rejected his suffering. His friends all told him that he must somehow be guilty of some aveiros. Iyov knew, however, that he was guiltless! He could only see blind fate as somehow responsible for the way his life had turned out, and he cursed that natural fate. The intervention of Elihu changed his

perception. Elihu introduced him to the concept of gilgul; Iyov then understood that his life was meant to remedy the misdeeds of an evildoer who had preceded him.)

Avraham was largely correct - even if the suffering would catch up with his son, rather than himself. Yitzchok, according to Chazal, inaugurated the entire concept of living with suffering. To be sure, his suffering was minor, compared to that of Iyov. It could have been different, were it not for the fact that when Hashem remembered Soro and allowed her to conceive, He worked the same miracle for Milcah - resulting in the birth of Iyov, who lightened the burden that Yitzchok otherwise would have borne.

Our pasuk alludes to this by opening with "and it was" / vayehi, the ominous phrase that portends tragedy and unhappiness. It hints at the trials and suffering of Iyov, who is introduced to us here under a different name.

Alternatively, the darkness hinted at is the birth of Rivkah to Besu'el. Had Rivka not been born to such a rasha, she would not have later produced an Esav!

This explains why the Torah's next topic is the death of Soro. It is well known that the Soton pounced upon Soro's passing, attempting to undermine Avrohom's stellar accomplishment at the Akeidah. "See what that majestic gesture to HKBH achieved for you! No great berachah. Only the death of your wife, through the heartache of hearing about the near-sacrifice of her son!"

Even if the Soton had been correct about the cause of Soro's death, he still would have been off the mark. The Ari taught that Yitzchok's neshamah was only empowered to last for 37 years, after which he would have to die. Approaching the end of his allotted time, Yitzchok submitted to the Akeidah, causing his neshamah to jump from his body. To sustain him, Hashem gave Yitzchok a second, new neshamah. The Akeidah, therefore, did not result in the almost-death of Yitzchok. On the contrary. Without it, he would surely have died. Because of his eager participation in it, he was granted a new lease on life.

In fact, however, the Soton was not correct in linking Soro's death altogether to the news of the Akeidah. Soro had lived 137 glorious years. Her time had come. The harbinger of this was the birth of Rivka, the tzadeikes. As Chazal often observe, the bright sun of the successor generation begins to shine prior to the setting sun of the previous one.

As Soro's brilliant light began to fade, Rivkah's began to appear. Rivkah's birth signaled the end of Soro's mission, and the years allotted to their accomplishment.

Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 22:21
2. Bereishis Rabbah, 56:4

