

# YITZCHAK'S DIMENSION AS PATRIARCH

*by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky*

The Torah states, "Now Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything (ba'kol)." Rashi cites Chazal who explain that "ba'kol" alludes to Yitzchak. "The numerical value of "ba'kol- everything" is equivalent to "ben (son)." [The numerical value of the letter "bais" is 2 and the numerical value of the letter "nun" is 50 - which is the same numerical value of the letters of ba'kol.] Chazal continue, "Now that Avraham had a son, he needed to find him the proper wife." G'd had already blessed Avraham. Why at, this moment, does the Torah reveal to us that G'd blessed Avraham "ba'kol - everything?" - which alludes to Yitzchak.

One may say that after the Akeidah, when Yitzchak did not resist being offered as a sacrifice, Avraham realized that his son was unique and special. Although he was 37 years old at the time of the Akeidah, Yitzchak was willing to give his life for G'd. Thus, G'd blessed Avraham "ba'kol" (alluding to Yitzchak), indicating how special he was. However, at this time Yitzchak was 40 years old and the Akeidah had already taken place three years earlier. Why does the Torah now reveal how special Yitzchak truly was?

It is interesting to note that at the end of the Portion of Bereishis, regarding the birth of Noach, the Torah states, "Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and he begot a son (vayoled ben)." Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "The Torah states he begot a ben (son) to allude to the fact that the future world (post Great Flood) shall be built from him (Noach). This is because the word "ben" is derived from the word "binyan - structure." Noach was the future of existence because all life perished in the Great Flood. Thus the Torah alludes to the uniqueness of Noach by using the expression ben (son). Similarly, the Torah alludes to the uniqueness and special status of Yitzchak through the expression of "ba'kol" which also connotes "ben/structure/son."

When Avraham instructed Eliezer to locate a proper wife for Yitzchak, he bound him with an oath that had the most severe ramifications and consequences if it should be violated. If he would not abide meticulously to every aspect of Avraham's instructions, Eliezer would forfeit his share in this world and the world to come. Eliezer was the dedicated servant of Avraham. He was the administrator of all of Avraham's assets and household. Chazal tell us that Avraham had taught Eliezer all the Torah that he had learned. He was at such an advanced spiritual level that he radiated with a similar holiness as that of his master and mentor. He had proven his worthiness many times. Chazal explain that when Avraham went to battle against the four mightiest kings, he took with him 318 men, which in truth was only Eliezer. Numerically, the letters of the name "Eliezer" are the

equivalent of 318. Despite the fact that Eliezer was of great spiritual dimension, Avraham was concerned that even after instructing him he might deviate and not carry out his wishes as prescribed. Why was Avraham suspicious of Eliezer regarding the issue of locating a wife for his son, Yitzchak?

The Torah, through the word "ba'kol," alludes to the fact that Yitzchak, as the son of Avraham, was not only equivalent in every way to his father, but he also was a structure through which the future will be built. This is because "ba'kol" is numerically equivalent to the "ben" and "ben" alludes to "structure"- just as it did with Noach. However, the "ben" that is associated with Noach relates to the fact that he would be the father of all humanity after the Great Flood. Regarding Yitzchak the "ba'kol/ben" alludes to a more advanced level of creation. Yitzchak is the structure for all spirituality that is meant to come into existence until the end of time - namely, the Jewish people. Why does the Torah reveal to us now that Yitzchak was "ba'kol"?

After the Akeidah, Avraham understood that Yitzchak was exceptional and unique. When he was about to slaughter Yitzchak as a sacrifice, G'd said to Avraham that he was not even permitted to inflict a blemish upon Yitzchak for His sake. Although Avraham was not permitted to slaughter his son, he intended to inflict a wound that would cause the letting of blood as a symbol of the actual slaughter. In this way, he would be actualizing his initial intent through the blemish. However, G'd commanded him not to even cause a blemish upon his son.

After removing Yitzchak from the altar, Avraham saw a ram caught in the thicket. The ram attempted to run towards Avraham, but it was deterred. The Midrash tells us that satan intercepted the ram and did not allow it to approach Avraham. He wanted to prevent him from sacrificing the ram in the place of Yitzchak. Satan did this because he wanted to prevent Avraham from actualizing/concretizing his dedication to G'd through the sacrificing of the ram. He understood that even the most intense prosecution against the Jewish people would be silenced as a result of the merit of the Akeidah. Avraham understood that he was being given the opportunity (through Yitzchak - and ultimately the ram that was brought in his place) to guarantee the spiritual future of the Jewish people for all eternity. Thus, by alluding to Yitzchak as the person who is the equivalent of "ba'kol/ben," the Torah is revealing to us his significance and dimension of value, which would have far reaching ramifications into the future for the entire Jewish people.

Yitzchak embodied the ultimate fulfillment of purpose of existence (he was "ba'kol"). Thus, Avraham could not rely on the presumed and proven dedication of his servant Eliezer. Avraham understood that the future spiritual dimension of the Jewish people relied upon Yitzchak and the woman who was worthy to be the Matriarch. Avraham needed to insure and guarantee this ultimate goal. Thus, he adjured Eliezer to take an oath with the most serious consequences because he could not risk him deviating from his mission as much as an iota.

It is interesting to note that the Torah tells us that when Rivka left her home to marry Yitzchak, she

received a blessing from Lavan (the evil one) and her mother. They blessed her saying that her offspring should be in the thousands and should conquer the gates of the enemy etc. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that G'd caused Rivka to be barren so that her offspring should not be attributed to the blessing of Lavan. As it is written, "From the evil, only evil emanates ..." Thus, if Rivka was able to conceive naturally, her progeny would have had relevance to the blessing of Lavan and her mother. The spiritual dimension of the Jewish people would have been limited and tainted.

Avraham understood that every aspect of existence rested upon the spiritual level of the Jewish people. Thus, he took every precaution to insure that Eliezer should select the proper wife for Yitzchak - who is "ba'kol."

## **2. Avraham's Ultimate Level of Chesed**

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers), states, "The world stands on three principles: Torah, Avodah (Service to G'd), and Gemilas Chassadim (acts of loving kindness)." Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin zt'l in his commentary Ruach Chaim explains that each one of these principles correspond to a specific Patriarch. Avraham's most pronounced characteristic was chesed (doing acts of loving kindness). Yitzchak is associated with Avodah (Service to G'd) because he exemplified as "the unblemished offering - olah temimah" as a result of the Akeidah. Yaakov represents Torah study as he is referred to by the Torah as, "The perfect man who dwells in the tent (tent of Torah)."

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin zt'l explains that the person is comprised of three parts: the life source (Nefesh), soul (Nishama), and spirit (Ruach). All physical movement emanates from the Nefesh that is contained within the physical being. This life source is shared by man and animal alike. The Nishama is the spiritual essence that man possesses which is the basis for him to be classified as an intellectual being. Ruach (spirit - which means wind) is the spirit that gives man the power of speech (ability of expression). Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that just as each individual person is comprised of these three elements, the Jewish people (as a nation) also possess these three components.

Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the founding fathers of the Jewish people, respectively represent each one of these components. Avraham, our Patriarch corresponds to the Nefesh (life source) of the Jewish people because his most prominent characteristic was chesed. This was expressed through his physical involvement/movement that emanates from the Nefesh. Avraham perfected the Nefesh of the Jewish people through his unlimited acts of chesed. Yitzchak was the "unblemished offering." Just as the Kohen needed to meet criteria regarding his thought processes when he officiated with a sacrifice (so that the offering should not be invalidated), so too was Yitzchak pure in thought when he was brought as an offering. Therefore he corresponds to the Nishama/soul of the Jewish people because he perfected the soul of the Jewish people. Yaakov, our Patriarch who was continuously engaged in Torah study, corresponds to the Ruach (power of speech) of the Jewish people because Torah is studied through its articulation. Thus, he perfected

the Ruach/spirit of the Jewish people. The Torah tells us that Avraham purchased a burial location (the Machpelah) for his wife Sarah from Ephron. The Midrash tells us that after Avraham purchased the Machpelah, G'd said, "My craft is doing Chesed and you have taken hold of my craft. Now, come and cloak yourself with My Cloak." Meaning, now that Avraham had done Chesed for his wife Sarah, he became worthy of wearing the Cloak of G'd. Avraham was 137 years old when Sarah his wife died. He had been involved in Chesed on the most advanced level his entire life. Why only now, through the acquisition of the burial plot, is he considered worthy because he had taken hold of G'd's craft?

Every one of the Patriarchs emulated another facet of G'd's characteristics. Avraham is known as the pillar of Chesed because he offered to accommodate other people's material needs, through hospitality and indiscriminately -whether they were worthy or not. Yitzchak, our Patriarch, emulated the characteristic of Justice, which is self-perfection on the most meticulous level. Yaakov's most prominent characteristic was Mercy, which is a synthesis of Chesed and Justice. Although Avraham assumed the posture of Chesed to emulate G'd, these acts were not done for their own sake, but rather as a means to an end. The verse states, "The world was created as an expression of His Chesed." G'd's Kindness is not a means, but rather an end unto itself. However, when Avraham chose to assume this Attribute, it was used as a vehicle to espouse G'd's existence. Although Avraham's hospitality was unequalled because through it he transformed pagans into monotheists, it was only a means to an end. Therefore, Avraham's attribute of Chesed was not identical to G'd's. It was only a semblance of G'd's Chesed.

Rambam, in his commentary on the last Mishnah in Tractate Makkos, explains that the only way one could merit the special place in the world to come that is meant for him is to perform a mitzvah b'shleimus - in the most perfect manner. Until Avraham purchased the burial location for Sarah, he had not done the mitzvah of Chesed b'shleimus - (in the most perfect manner) because it was not for its own sake. However, when Avraham buried Sarah, this act was to do Chesed for Sarah- and not as a vehicle to accomplish another end. Consequently, he performed the mitzvah b'shleimus. Thus, at that moment became worthy to wear the Cloak of G'd because he assumed His craft. By perfecting the Attribute of Chesed within himself at the most advanced level, Avraham perfected the Nefesh of the Jewish people for all eternity.

### **3. Humility - the Key to Satisfaction**

The Torah tells us that after Rivka's family agreed to release their daughter to Eliezer to be taken as wife for Yitzchak, The Torah states, "...he (Eliezer) prostrated himself to the ground unto Hashem." Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that we learn from Eliezer's prostration, "One must give thanks (to G'd) for good tidings." When one receives something of special value, it is obvious that one must be thankful. Does the Torah need to communicate this lesson in proper behavior through the prostration of Eliezer? Evidently, Eliezer's prostration portrays a paradigm for being thankful.

It is important to understand that the act of prostration is demonstrating a total negation of oneself.

The more deserving one believes he is, the less appreciative he will be. However, if one is truly humble and thus feels not deserving, then he will be truly appreciative and thankful as a recipient of something good. The arrogant and self-absorbed person believes that he is entitled. Thus, when he is the beneficiary of goodness, he does not feel beholden to anyone. However, when a person negates himself through the act of prostration, which is an expression of humility and submission, he has the capacity to appreciate the good tidings he receives.

It is understood that if one is a beneficiary of the kindness of the goodness of another, he must be thankful- minimally to say "thank you." However, what we are able to draw from Eliezer's behavior/prostration is to what degree one must bring himself to truly feel thankful. The Torah states that when one brings the newly ripened fruits, bikkurim, to the Temple mount one must make a declaration of appreciation as prescribed by the Torah. He recounts certain events which transpired as far back as Yaakov (our Patriarch) being saved from the hands of his evil father-in-law, Lavan. After the declaration is made, the individual prostrates himself before G'd. The Torah continues, " And you shall rejoice with all the goodness that Hashem, your G'd, has given you and your household..." The Torah is teaching us that one is only able to experience the value of G'd's blessing after he has prostrated himself before Him. Seemingly the joy and recognition of all the good that G'd had bestowed on this individual is only realized after the individual prostrates himself before G'd. When one is truly humbled, he internalizes the fact that he is not deserving and is only a beneficiary of G'd's Kindness. If one feels that he is deserving, then he will not be able to rejoice with the good that G'd or anyone else bestows upon him because he feels he deserves more. The Gemara tells us that when one recites the Amidah (silent prayer) one should not feel that G'd owes him a response. This is considered arrogance. Only through having a sense of being not deserving/unworthiness is one able to be truly thankful.

#### **4. Yitzchak and Rivka- the Reenactment of Creation**

The Torah tells us that the woman who Eliezer sought out to be the wife for his master's son, Yitzchak, had to possess a level of chesed (kindness) that paralleled Avraham's. Eliezer prayed to G'd that when he arrives at his destination, he should come upon a woman who will offer water to him when he requests it for himself and for his men. In addition she will offer to water his camels. When Eliezer arrived at his destination, he met a young maiden who actually met all the standards of chesed for which he had prayed. After being a beneficiary of Rivka's unusual kindness, Eliezer was convinced that this was the predestined wife for Yitzchak. Although Yitzchak our Patriarch assumed the posture of the Attribute of Justice (Midas Ha Din), Eliezer sought out a wife for him who personified the Attribute of Chesed - at the most unusual level. It was Avraham, our Patriarch, who embodied chesed (kindness). If Yitzchak was the Patriarch who represented precise justice, why did Eliezer seek out a wife that possessed the characteristic of chesed?

The verse states, "Olam chesed yibaneh - the world was created out of chesed." The creation of existence was solely out of G'd's Kindness. Avraham, our Patriarch, because he was the equivalent of

a new existence (after G'd had added the letter "hay" to his name), chose the Attribute of Chesed to emulate G'd. While the setting of creation may have emanated from G'd's chesed, He wished to engage with creation through the Attribute of Justice. The initial intent of creation was to be exacting, precise, and perfect. Thus, the Torah states, "Bereishis bara Elokim ais ha shamayim... In the beginning of G'd's creating the heavens..." The appellation of G'd used by the Torah is "Elokim (G'd)" which denotes the Attribute of Justice. However when man was created, because he was prone to fail, G'd did not implement exacting justice (Midas HaDin), but rather, He chose to synthesize with it the Attribute of Mercy- (denoted by the appellation "Hashem (YKVK) Elokim"). Therefore, although the setting of creation was chesed (kindness), it was din (precision) that actually brought creation into existence. With this we can understand why Eliezer sought out the wife for Yitzchak who possessed the characteristic of chesed.

The Torah alludes to Yitzchak as "ba'kol - everything." Chazal explain that the "ba'kol" has the same numerical value as "ben" (son) which alludes to Yitzchak being the structure through which spiritual existence will develop. He encompasses all the spirituality that is meant to come into existence until the end of time, namely, the Jewish people. Thus, just as creation came into existence through the Attribute of Justice, emanating from the Chesed of G'd (the basis for creation is G'd's Chesed), so too Yitzchak would bring forth the spiritual setting for the Jewish people within the setting of chesed that was personified by Rivka, his wife. The Gemara refers to the wife as the "bayis (home/house)" of the man. This is the location in which man invests his ability.

The Gemara tells us that each of the three Patriarchs initiated one of the three daily prayers that we recite. Avraham established/instituted shachris (morning Amidah), Yitzchak instituted mincha (afternoon Amidah prayer), and Yaakov established arvis (evening Amidah prayer). The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zora explains the basis for Yitzchak being the Patriarch who established mincha is based on the verse, "Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field towards evening (in the afternoon)..." Immediately following this verse the Torah states, "Rivka raised her eyes and saw Yitzchak..." Kli Yakar writes, that the juxtaposition of these two verses is to communicate to us that Rivka's coming to be the wife of Yitzchak is an immediate consequence of his tefillah (prayer).

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that the mincha service is particularly important and therefore one must give special value to it because of its effectiveness. The Gemara tells us that Eliyahu (the Prophet) prayed on Har HaCarmel (Mt. Carmel) and G'd immediately responded to his request. The evening prayer has relevance to the Attribute of Justice because the nighttime period is associated with judgment. Thus the nighttime period is not the optimum time to beseech G'd for His Mercy and Kindness. Similarly the Morning Prayer because of its close juxtaposition to the night also has a slight association with the Attribute of Justice. However the afternoon prayer, mincha, because it has no degree of association with the nighttime period (Attribute of Justice), it evokes the greatest level of Mercy - G'd's immediate response. Yitzchak, whose characteristic was Justice (Din) chose to beseech G'd in the context of Rachamim (Mercy). Similarly, the wife of Yitzchak needed to

represent Chesed so that he should function as Din within that context.

It was through the synthesis of Yitzchak (Justice) and Rivka (Chesed/Kindness) that the Jewish people came forth through their son Yaakov, the most special of the Patriarchs, who personified the Attribute of Mercy.

### **5. Spirituality - Avraham's Focus in Existence (from Vayeira)**

The Torah states, "And he (the angel) said (to Avraham), 'I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold Sarah your wife will have a son.' Now Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent which was behind him. Now Avraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, the manner of women had ceased to be with Sarah (she could no longer conceive) - And Sarah laughed at herself, saying, 'After I have withered shall I again have delicate skin? And my husband is old!' Sarah was skeptical regarding what she had overheard (that she would conceive) for two reasons: firstly, she was beyond childbearing years and secondly, Avraham was old.

G'd came to Avraham and said, "Why is it that Sarah laughed, saying 'Shall I in truth bear a child, though I have aged...?' Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when G'd repeated the words of Sarah to Avraham He had altered the truth. He only shared with Avraham that Sarah said that she was too old to bear a child. G'd omitted her statement "...my husband is old" because "one alters the truth for shalom (harmony in the home - shalom bayis)."

Is it possible that if G'd had revealed to Avraham the second part of Sarah's statement, that he would have been slighted - affecting their shalom bayis? People of Avraham's and Sarah's dimension of spirituality would not feel slighted or offended with this type of comment - especially if it were true. They understood that just as Sarah could only conceive as a result of a miracle, so too Avraham was only able to father a child as a result of a similar miracle. So if this is the case, why did G'd omit the second statement of Sarah? Avraham is depicted by Chazal as one of the most humble people who ever lived. As he had said, "I am only dust and ash."

This issue of shalom bayis addressed by Chazal is not within the context of our understanding. The basis for concern over shalom bayis was not Sarah's questioning of Avraham's virility. But rather, the issue centered around a spiritual failing within Sarah. She was skeptical regarding two miracles that G'd had promised would occur - that she would return to a youthful fertile state and Avraham would be able to father a child. Thus, her skepticism was considered a double spiritual failing. Thus, if G'd had shared the full extent of her skepticism with Avraham, it could have diminished her value in his eyes because she had failed spiritually on two levels.

Chofetz Chaim z'tl writes in his work Chofetz Chaim, that if one is asked to offer information concerning another individual for the purpose of business partnership or potential marriage, one is permitted to convey even negative information because it is for a constructive purpose. For example, if one is asked about the honesty of an individual, one is permitted to respond by saying "he is honest" or "he is dishonest." It is not considered lashon harah (negative speech) to respond in

this manner because it is purposeful. The halacha (law) dictates that if a limited amount of information is sufficient to discourage one from entering into the partnership, one is not permitted to add other negative information (beyond the minimum). This is because the additional information would have no constructive value. Therefore, it would be classified as lashon harah.

After G'd informed Avraham (with a constructive intent) that Sarah had laughed because she thought that she was beyond the age to bear children, why is it that He did not reveal her second statement - "my husband is old?" It would seem that G'd had already given sufficient information to Avraham to rebuke her for her spiritual failing. By adding that Sarah had said, "my husband is old" it would seem to be lashon hara because it is superfluous. If so, how do Chazal attribute G'd's omission of the second statement to preserving shalom bayis?

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that at the battle of Ai there were 36 Jewish casualties. G'd had communicated to Joshua, "The Jews had sinned." Someone had taken from the spoils of Jericho when they were not permitted to do so. Yehoshua asked G'd, "Who was the individual who had sinned?" G'd responded, "I am not one who speaks lashon hara. Thus, I will not reveal the name of that individual." If so, similarly, maybe G'd omitted the second statement of Sarah because He does not communicate negative information when it serves no constructive purpose.

Evidently, Chazal understood that the revelation of the second statement of Sarah would have not been superfluous. Avraham's understanding to what degree Sarah had failed would have led him to rebuke her in a different manner. If so, then why did G'd omit her second statement? Chazal understood that although the second statement had constructive value, G'd omitted it because it would have diminished the shalom bayis between Avraham and Sarah. Shalom bayis was the overriding factor.

Thus, although one is permitted to provide additional negative information when it has constructive value, he should not do so if there is a concern that it may have a negative affect on the shalom bayis of another individual. Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

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