

INNER SANCTITY

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Yitzchak Avinu is the most enigmatic of all the Avos. On the one hand, he is presented as a fearless and successful entrepreneur who was comfortable in the presence of kings and generals. On the other hand, having left behind the wells that he labored to dig and develop he seemed to have run from conflict and confrontation.

On the one hand, Yitzchak is the "Oleh Timimah - the perfect offering." As the only human to have been offered as a Korban, Yitzchak transcended the inherent limits of the physical and attained, as a human, the realm of the spiritual. For Yitzchak, the material world was insignificant. His existence matched those of the angels who shed tears at the time of his Akeidah - binding. On the other hand, Yitzchak appeared to have a focused interest in eating the tastiest food that Eisav could prepare before he would bless him. Why? How important could a meal have been in creating the appropriate mood for Yitzchak?

Each of the Forefathers represented a different stage in the history of the Jewish people. Yaakov symbolized the past and present Jew who has had to survive against persecution, and who has suffered the loneliness of exile. Avraham symbolized the future Jew who will live during the messianic era. World renown and beloved, teaching the truths of G-d's word and revealing His actuality in the ongoing miracle of nature. Yitzchak symbolized the Jew who will exist in the World-To-Come. Unfettered by the limits of his corporal being, his will be able to soar to the eternal heights of divine understanding and appreciation.

There have been others, Jews and non-Jews, who attained a spiritual existence without experiencing death. For example: Chanoch in the year 987 - 2774 b.c.e., Eliezar the servant of Avraham, Serach the daughter of Asher, and the great prophet Eliyahu. However, their experience was to exchange their physical selves and enter the realm of heaven without having to go through the transition of death. Yitzchak, on the other hand, attained a level of purity and purpose that sanctified his physical self so that he became a living, breathing angel. He did not enter the realm of heaven. He lived and died as all other humans do, but in the span of time that was his life, Yitzchak attained spiritual perfection.

In this regard, Yitzchak may have been even greater than Moshe. Moshe's understanding of G-d's actuality surpassed that of all humans to have ever lived. Moshe was the only human to scale the limits of physicality and enter the realm of heaven as a human. However, upon descending from Sinai, Moshe too descended into the struggles and frays of humanism. Yitzchak, on the other hand,

never entered the portals of heaven clothed in physicality. Yitzchak remained purely human at all times anchored to the very earth from which he had been formed. However, in the short span of 37 years, he accomplished the total subjugation and sanctification of his physical self in G-d's service. He became the perfect, physical human offering. He became as the angels.

If Yitzchak attained a level of purity akin to if not greater than that of Moshe, why was it that Moshe's face radiated light while Yitzchak's face did not? (The question assumes that the "light" was the physical manifestation of Moshe's inner sanctity).

I would like to suggest that Yitzchak, and possibly all the Avos, were at a level that merited having their countenances radiate their inner sanctity. However, the external manifestation of kedusha requires more than the merit of the "holy person," it also depends on whether or not others merit being able to see holiness. In the times of Moshe, the Generation of the Desert was deserving of witnessing the outward signs of G-dliness. In the times of the forefathers, the generations were not at a level that they merited seeing the overt affects of sanctity.

At the beginning of the third section of the Kuzari, R' Yehudah Halevi presented a perspective on what it means to be a "servant of G-d?" The Chaver answered, "Certainly not a hermit who shuns society. A true servant of G-d would never consider life, G-d's greatest gift, a burden. It is to be savored, each additional moment thought of as a precious boon, because it is a sure path to Olam HabBa. Each fleeting moment can yield eternity." (Translation by Rabbi Moshe Eiseman - Shelter Among The Shadows).

It is obvious and proper to believe that G-d created the human to live in His world and enjoy His majestic creation. To assume that we were created to live a life of asceticism is to assume that G-d perpetrated on humanity a cruel joke or an impossibly unfair challenge.

The Chaver continued: "For most people a life of asceticism would be self defeating. They would crave all those legitimate experiences for which nature endowed them. Sounds and sights, the company of friends, the daily challenge of living and making a living would all clamor for attention. We want to eat, to drink and to live normal married lives. We want to make money, to have decent homes, to lend a hand to the needy and to support Torah scholars with our bounty. A life of exaggerated austerity will simply backfire. It will drive a wedge between the would-be hermit and G-d, rather than bring them closer together. Instead of making him feel holy, it will make him bitter because of all he has missed." (Ibid.).

From the moment that Yakov and Eisav were born, Yitzchak dreamt of his two sons working together to build the Jewish people. Yitzchak, the quintessential pure human, understood the intrinsic value of the material world. Yitzchak recognized the inherent holiness in everything that G-d had created, because G-d had created them! As it states in Psalm 148, "Let them praise the name of Hashem, for he commanded and they were created." Yitzchak understood that life was an opportunity to live within G-d's universe and willfully serve Him by revealing his greatness and

majesty within everything He had created.

Yitzchak knew that it was never intended for man to live by bread alone. The human was to revel in the beauty and bounty of G-d's extraordinary generosity and love. Yitzchak knew that devotion and G-dliness had to be supported by materialistic sustenance and pleasure. One without the other would surely fail. Therefore, Yitzchak dreamed of a partnership between the spiritualist Yaakov and the materialist Eisav. Eisav would support Yaakov and Yaakov would give real purpose and direction to Eisav.

Yitzchak intended to convey upon his sons the blessings most appropriate to their individual callings. Eisav was to have received the blessing of materialism in the support of G-dliness and Yaakov was to have received the blessings of recognizing and then teaching the spirituality inherent within materialism.

Of the two sons, Yitzchak was much more confident in Yaakov's ability to fulfill his intended destiny than in Eisav's willingness to serve G-d. Therefore, from the time they were very young, "Yitzchak loved Eisav." That did not mean that he did not love Yaakov. How could he not have loved Yaakov?

Yaakov was his life-long student. Yaakov was the essence of all that was good and true in humanity. Yaakov's face adorned the celestial throne of G-d! Yitzchak's love for Eisav was in the focus Yitzchak brought to bear upon Eisav. Yitzchak wished to model for Eisav the true value of living a materialistic life in the service of G-d.

Yitzchak was the successful entrepreneur who could hob knob and negotiate with the Avimelech's and Phicol's of the world. At the same time, his interests were far more profound than mere material gain or physical security. Yitzchak dug wells for reasons beyond the obvious. Yitzchak's diggings opened the core of spirituality and the wells of Torah inherent in Eretz Yisroel. Yitzchak was preparing the land for his future children and grandchildren. The water rights that were so previous to the Plishtim were irrelevant to Yitzchak. So long as he accomplished their true purpose he was more than willing to move on and dig again.

At the time of the blessings, Yitzchak wanted to model for Eisav and prepare Eisav for his intended task. Therefore, Yitzchak asked Eisav to use his physical prowess as a hunter and prepare for him his favorite dish. Yitzchak was testing Eisav. "If you will use your strength and ability to serve me in preparation of receiving G-d's blessings then you will prove to me that you understand the value of your designated obligations. Then you will be worthy of your destiny."

In the end, due to the theatrics of Rivka and Yaakov, it became clear to Yitzchak that Eisav was unworthy of his blessing. Therefore, he immediately reconfirmed the blessing of materialism in the support of spirituality upon Yaakov.

Yitzchak, who was the true Oleh Timimah - perfect offering, loved a materialistic existence because it manifested the essence of G-d's holiness. It therefore makes perfect sense that he should be the

Av - Father who represents Olam HaBa, that stage of existence that is the purpose and focus of our materialistic world.

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