

INREACH + OUTREACH = YAKOV

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The Medresh on this week's Parsha records the following statement. "R' Shmuel the son of R' Yitzchak said, Avraham was only saved from the fiery furnace in the merit of Yakov. This is analogous to a king who condemned his subject to be burned at the stake. Before carrying out the sentence the royal astrologers informed the king that the condemned man was destined to have a daughter who would become the queen! So too with Avraham. G-d initially decided that Avraham should die in the fiery furnace. G-d then looked into the future and saw that Yakov would descend from Avraham and therefore saved Avraham."

What an amazing Medresh! Avraham, the father of monotheism, the one person in all of history to earn the title, "The one who loved G-d," was not saved for his own merits? If not for Avraham's singular passion and devotion to G-d and his search for understanding and truth, the world would still be filled with idol worship! What greater merit could any one person have in their lifetime than having opened up the soul of humanity to the reality of G-d? Yet, the Medresh says that he was only saved because of Yakov's merits? What about Yitzchak? Why didn't the Medresh say that Avraham was saved so that he could be the father of Yitzchak, the only person ever to be offered as a Korban as per the commandment of G-d?

Eliyahu Ki Tov offers the following insight into the Medresh and into the relationship between Avraham and Yakov.

Avraham was the only person deserving of the title, "The one who loved G-d." As such, that title best defines the uniqueness of Avraham the person in contrast to the rest of humanity. Avraham lived a life of mixed emotions. On the one hand his personal love for G-d was so great that he desired nothing more than to be closer to G-d than humanly possible. On the other hand, Avraham passionately devoted his entire being to maximizing the world's knowledge and awareness of G-d. He chose service to humanity over spiritual self-advancement. Had Avraham been given the choice between the non-corporal existence of soul and heaven with its limitless capacity for knowing G-d vs. the physically bound and limited existence of being mortal and limited by time and intellect, Avraham would have chosen a heavenly and unbound existence. As Chazal have said, "One moment of just smelling the scent of Olam Habah is a greater reward than all the pleasures of this world."

Keep in mind that Rav Dessler explained "all the pleasures of this world" as referring to all the pleasure ever experienced by every person who ever lived and will ever live from the beginning of

time till the end of time. All that combined pleasure is rendered insignificant when contrasted with the pleasure of a single moment of "smelling" the fragrance of Olam Habah. It is no wonder that Avraham would have chosen to not be a part of this world. Yet, he remained in this world although his singular desire and passion was to go beyond this world.

Why did G-d keep Avraham in this world and how did Avraham use the time granted to him? G-d kept Avraham in this world because he had to give birth to Yitzchak who would give birth to Yakov. The end game was the creation of Yakov. Therefore, G-d kept Avraham around, although he deserved to go beyond his own mortality. While he was here already, Avraham gave his all to sharing with the world his greatest pleasure desire and passion. He used his time teaching the world about G-d.

More so than that is what Rav Yakov Weinberg Zt'l once explained that Avraham's love was so great for G-d that all other things, including being close to G-d, were sacrificed in service to G-d. Rav Weinberg was referring to the incident with the Three Angels. At the time of their visit Avraham was in the midst of receiving a prophecy; G-d Himself had come to visit Avraham. Yet, although that moment had to be the closest any human could ever realize in approximating the World To Come, Avraham gave it up to run and do the Mitzvah of Hachnosas Orchim (hospitality), to run and do the will of G-d. Such was the greatness of Avraham's love for G-d. Nothing else mattered except doing the will of G-d.

It is interesting to note that Avraham died on the day that Yakov purchased the birthright from Eisav. Avraham died at the age of 175. Yitzchak was born when Avraham was 100. Yakov and Eisav were born when Yitzchak was 60. Therefore, Yakov and Eisav were 15 when Avraham died.

The story of Eisav returning from the field and finding Yakov cooking a pot of red lentils is explained in Rashi as Yakov's preparing for Yitzchak the first meal after returning from the cemetery. That means that Yakov purchased the birthright from Eisav on the same day that Avraham died. That means that Avraham died when his mission was completed. Avraham's mission was to be certain that Yakov was in his rightful place to assume the leadership of the Jewish people. With the purchase of Eisav's birthright Yakov attained his rightful place.

Each of the Avos contributed to the formation of the nation.

Avraham instilled in the Jewish nation the desire to go out into the world and share kindness, love, mercy, knowledge and truth. His strength was in outreach.

Yitzchak instilled in the Jewish nation the desire to sanctify their selves in service to G-d. In so doing they influence the world to a greater degree of sanctity and devotion. His strength was in inreach.

Yakov was neither the outreach professional nor the insular inreach devotee. Yakov limited his outreach and expanded his inreach. Yakov limited his outreach to perfecting his children and expanded his inreach to include his children. It was Yakov who was responsible for building the

"family" of the nation.

G-d never intended to give the Torah to just one person or one family. G-d was only going to give the Torah to the whole world, or minimally to one nation. As explained in previous issues of the Rabbi's Notebook, the entire episode of our enslavement in Egypt was to guarantee the exclusive and insular growth of Yakov's family of 70 individuals into a nation of three million. Had it not been for the enslavement and ghettoization of Yakov's family, the family would have certainly assimilated into the surrounding Egyptian culture and been lost within the melting pot of humanity.

Avraham was but one person. Along with Sarah he opened his yeshiva (school) and spread the world of G-d to thousands of yearning souls. Yitzchak was but one person. Along with Rivkah he opened his yeshiva and graduated one very unique and special student - his son Yakov. Yakov was but one person. Along with his four wives he did not open a Yeshiva. They gave birth to his Yeshiva. His twelve sons, each destined to become a tribe, were the entire focus of his existence and teaching.

In contrasting Yakov to both Yitzchak and Avraham, there are greater parallels to Avraham than to Yitzchak. Avraham left his father's home, as did Yakov. Yitzchak never had to leave his father's home. Avraham taught an entire world while Yakov taught an entire nation. Yitzchak just taught his one son. Avraham engaged the outside world in battle and won. Yakov engaged the outside world in battle and survived. On the other hand, Yitzchak avoided conflict with the outside world as seen in the episode of the digging of the wells and the Plishtim claiming the water rights.

Avraham foretold the life of the Jew in relation to the world at the time of Mashiach. At that time each Jew will be responsible for teaching the way of G-d to tens of thousands of non-Jews. (1: 70 ratio)

Yitzchak foretold the life of the Jew in the futuristic World To Come. That will be a world of total sanctity and spirituality. It will be a world of perfection and unencumbered Divine revelation. The distinction between Jew and non-Jew will disappear in favor of righteous and non-righteous, deserving and non-deserving. The Jew will not be responsible for teaching the non-Jew and the non-Jew will not be responsible to learn from the Jew. Instead, all the righteous will continue to grow from the direct revelation of G-d's unlimited essence - each according to his or her own level.

Yakov's life foretold the life of the Jew throughout human history. At times that history has been glory filled and magnificent. At other times our history has been pain filled and tragic. However, wherever we have been and wherever we are destined to go the Jewish people survive on the strength of family. As G-d promised to Avraham, "And the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

The Jew has not had the luxury of focusing only inward. The inreach of Yitzchak is the selfish dream and vision of a world not yet created. Not a bad selfishness but a premature selfishness. So long as there are others who do not recognize G-d or appreciate His goodness it is the job of every G-d fearing individual to reach out and teach by word and by example. However, in a world where

everyone knows and appreciates G-d, the individual can be righteously selfish in furthering his own knowledge and understanding. It is like a world where there is no hunger and therefore no need for charity. If such a time would exist each of us could selfishly and righteously keep what we have and not think in terms of charity and selflessness.

The time preceding Mashiach, the time of Yakov, is a time for inreach and outreach. Inreach as the only means for maintaining both self and family within the lure and challenge of society and outreach as the natural outgrowth of living a G-dly life in contrast to the lures and challenges of society. However, even the inreach is selfless rather than selfish. The inreach is toward family not just self.

Yitzchak attained perfection as a single man. He attained personal perfection before he married Rivkah. His marriage to Rivkah was necessary to complete his mission as the father of Yakov, not in perfecting his own soul. The teaching he did was as the father of Yakov. He had to teach and train Yakov to become the Chosen One who would have the strength to live his life selflessly yet selfishly among the inhospitable outside world.

The Pasuk describes Yakov as "Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim." He was a "wholesome man living in tents." That means that Yakov's "perfection" required living in the seclusion of his father and mother's home. The kind of "Tmimus" - "wholesomeness" - "perfection" that Yitzchak represented could not be sustained outside of the "tent." (Tent can also mean the land of Israel.) For Yitzchak that was OK because that was his unique destiny; however, for Yakov, he needed to learn how to take perfection and survive in the outside world. For that he needed the quality of Avraham and Sarah. For that he needed to create a "Tent" that would travel with him wherever he went. (Think abt. the Mishkan - Tabernacle)

The Medresh we began with now makes sense. Of course Avraham was greater than great and merited to exist for his sake and accomplishments. More so, if not for Avraham and Sarah's merits and accomplishments neither Yitzchak nor Yakov would have merited coming into existence. However, the Medresh is not describing the greatness of Avraham the person, Avraham the father of monotheism. The Medresh is focusing on Avraham the progenitor of a nation. Avraham was saved because he would one day give birth to a Yitzchak who in turn would birth Yakov. Yakov in turn would birth the fundamental elements of the nation that would one day receive G-d's Torah. The purpose was the end game of the process, a nation described by G-d as "My kingdom of priests and holy nation."

Each Av (forefather) contributed necessary components of the nation and each built on his predecessor's accomplishments; however, all would have been for naught if not for Yakov. Yakov made the nation a reality; therefore, Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace in the merit of Yakov. Would there have been the greatness of Yakov without the extraordinary greatness of Avraham and Yitzchak? Of course not; however, the Medresh intent is not to merely compliment, its purpose was

to teach the essence of our purpose and the reason for our existence. That mission and reason was first realized under Yakov's watch.

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