

SEEKING YITZCHAK

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Avraham was 100 years old when Yitzchak was born. Yitzchak was 60 years old when Yakov was born. Avraham was 175 years old when he died; Yitzchak was 180 years old when he died; and Yakov was 147 years old when he died. Yitzchak lived for 100 years after the death of his father Avraham. Yakov lived for 27 years after the death of his father Yitzchak.

Yitzchak lived through Yakov's 36-year absence. Yitzchak lived through the incident of Dina's abduction. Yitzchak was 168 when the Brothers sold Yoseph into slavery. Of the 22 years that Yoseph was away from his family Yitzchak was alive for 12 of them.

After Yitzchak's married Rivkah the Torah's shifted it's focus away from Avraham. (Avraham was 140 years old at that time.) Except for the final notes on Avraham's marriage to Keturah, his death, and his burial, the Torah closed the book on that extraordinary figure. Avraham was the man who altered the destiny of his world and brought blessing and the potential for redemption to our universe. His life was truly a singular moment in human history.

Concurrent with the story of Avraham we were introduced to the relatively enigmatic Yitzchak. His miraculous birth, Akeidah (binding), marriage to Rivkah, fatherhood, limited but profound interaction with the Plishtim, and final blessings to Yakov and Eisav are the basic events in the recorded life of Yitzchak. Note that Yitzchak was 123 at the time of the blessings and would live for another 58 years.

Starting with this week and for the remainder of Sefer Bereishis, the events of Yakov's life and the lives of his sons take center stage.

A contrast of the Avos and the years that their lives overlapped with each other suggests a profound insight into Yitzchak and the manner of his relationship with G-d. Avraham lived for 75 years of Yitzchak's life. Until the Akeidah when Yitzchak was 37 years old, Avraham was Yitzchak's primary teacher. Following the Akeidah and Sarah's death, Yitzchak left his parent's home and entered the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. He remained there for 3 years until he married Rivkah. He was 40 years old.

Something happened at the Akeidah. Some change or realization occurred which necessitated Yitzchak's moving on to the academy of his great grandfathers'. What happened? Why wasn't it sufficient for Yitzchak to continue studying with his father for the remaining 38 years of Avraham's life? Why did the Torah write Avraham out of the script after Yitzchak's marriage to Rivkah? Didn't Yitzchak continue to study with his father after his three years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever?

Last week's Parsha began with Yitzchak and Rivkah praying for children and the unusual nature of Rivkah's pregnancy. However, as soon as Yakov and Eisav were born the Torah relates the incident of Yakov purchasing the first-born birth right from Eisav. The focus shifted away from Yitzchak and Rivkah to the emerging differences between Yakov and Eisav. Then, the Torah returned to the story of Yitzchak's dealings with the local Plishtim, his successes as a farmer and his conflicts over wells and water rights. Once resolved, the final recorded scene with Yitzchak and Rivkah was the conspiracy and delivery of the blessings to Yakov and Eisav. As mentioned before, Yitzchak was 123 at that juncture in history. As we calculated earlier, Yitzchak was present in the lives and events of his grandchildren till 10 years before the family descended to Egypt. Why wasn't he mentioned again?

Yitzchak was the only human G-d ever chose to be a Korban (offering). As such, he attained a level of perfection bordering on the impossible. However, his perfection was physical, not spiritual. Spiritual perfection is impossible. As long as there is life to be lived there is perfection to be attained. As a human, Yitzchak had overcome the assumed and normal urges of the material world. He was truly without blemish.

The verse states, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth." It is far more difficult to accomplish discipline, purpose, and sanctity when young than it is to accomplish when older. An older individual has usually lived and lost, tried and failed, and hopefully learned and grown. Experience is a great teacher of value and purpose and time is more precious the more it passes. However, the young crave experience and fear missing out on life. They are foolish enough to ignore consequence and lack the courage to overcome peer pressure and fear. Therefore, it is unusual to find a person who "Remembered His Creator in the days of his youth." It is the old and the "less young" who first begin to remember their Creator.

My Father-in-law Zt'l (Rabbi Chaim Shapiro) was an unusual person who remained unknown despite his fame and recognition. His stories, speeches, and books, related a story whose underlying message was "Have Bitachon. Trust G-d. Believe in G-d. G-d did miracles and continues to do miracles." However, most people do not take the time to look deeper into the stories of his life. If they did so they would find a young man whose determination to remain Kadosh, holy and sanctified, was greater than his fear of death.

In his later years my Father-in Law Zt'l gained a reputation for giving Berachos (blessings) that would be realized. Whether marriages, children, health, or income, his Tefilos (prayers) were accepted in heaven and changes would often take place, seemingly miraculously. Because he was a very unassuming individual, I only began to understand and appreciate that side of him once he had passed away. I wondered why it is that some people are given the gift of Berachos (giving blessings to others) while others, even much greater scholars and leaders, are not. I believe that to be a "Bracha Giver" one must be holy. One must be connected to G-d on a level that expresses a mutual trust in each other. The individual must fully believe and trust in G-d's ability and goodness,

regardless of the outcome, while G-d trusts the individual to live their lives with complete Emunah (faith) and Bitachon (trust), even to the extent of giving up their lives. However, it must start when they are young. They must prove themselves when the going is the hardest.

The generation of my Father-in-law lived when the going was hardest. For some, like him, they went one step further. They proved to G-d that they had the discipline and determination to remain holy even in the days of their youth. Despite all that was happening to them, they "always remembered their Creator."

Yitzchak was such a person. By the time he was 37, Yitzchak had proven his courage, determination, and strength in pursuing holiness and sanctity. It was specifically in the relative open environment of Avraham and Sarah's home that he proved himself. Had he closeted himself behind the walls of Yeshivas Shem and Ever his purity would have remained untested. However, with the help of Sarah and Avraham he realized his inner greatness and attained the level of "Remembering his Creator in the days of his youth."

Post Akeidah, Yitzchak was able to enter his great grandfather's academy because he had already proven himself worthy of being spiritual heir to Avraham. However, he could only remain there until it was time to marry and have children. The Jewish nation could not be born in isolation. They had to be raised with the challenges and attractions of assimilation and gain the strength to remain holy and pure. Otherwise, they could not be the role models of sanctity and holiness in the real world of nations, and societies.

Yitzchak existed on a level of trust that allowed him to see everything as good. Whether the conflict between his sons, Yakov's 36 year absence, Dina's abduction, and Yoseph's enslavement, Yitzchak existed above the time frame and perceived the world as the pure manifestation of G-d's will. So it was when he was young and so it was as he felt the cold blade of his father's knife pressed against his throat. He was able to transcend fear and attain serenity. He transcended the physical and attained holiness.

Subsequently, Yitzchak could never leave the land of Canaan because no other land could sustain his level of holiness. At the same time, he could not take an active role in the ongoing events of his children. No one can grant Emunah (faith) and Bitachon (trust) to anyone else. Yitzchak could not tell Yakov that Yoseph was alive. Yitzchak could not tell Yakov and the brothers that Dinah's abduction would somehow come full circle and the child sired by Shechem would one day marry Yoseph. Yitzchak could not tell Yakov that his exile would last 36 years and during that time he (Yitzchak) would not fear even one second for the well being of his son (Yakov). Every person must on their own experience the challenges of life and find their own level of Emunah and Bitachon. Each person must find the courage and determination to remain holy or to attain holiness. No one can do it for someone else. Therefore, Yitzchak is removed from the script after he becomes the Bracha Giver.

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