

THE SEEDS OF SALVATION ARE PLANTED WITHIN SITUATIONS OF DESPAIR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayera

The Seeds Of Salvation Are Planted Within Situations of Despair

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD# 875, Visiting The Sick - Are Two Better Than One? Good Shabbos!

On the way to Akeidas Yitzchak, Avraham Avinu may have been thinking that this was the end of the spiritual line for him. He could not possibly have imagined -- in light of this Divine command to offer up Yitzchak -- from where a Jewish nation could ever emerge. But "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man, and it is the plan of Hashem that ultimate comes to fruition." [Mishlei 19:21] This was not the end of the line, but the beginning of the line. We are not witnessing the end of Klal Yisrael, but rather the beginning of Klal Yisrael. How so?

Listen to a Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer and an Ari z"L:

Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer [Chapter 31] writes: When Avraham Avinu put the knife to Yitzchak's neck, Yitzchak's soul flew away and left him. In effect, he died. When Avraham then heard the Heavenly Voice proclaim "Send forth not your hand against the lad" the soul returned into Yitzchak's body. Yitzchak thus personally experienced the phenomenon of Techiyas haMeisim [resurrection of the dead]. At that moment, Yitzchak opened his mouth and recited the blessing: Blessed Are Thou who brings the dead back to life. (Baruch Ata Hashem, Mechayei haMeisim.) [This is the second bracha of "Shmoneh Esrei", which is considered to be the blessing of the Patriarch Yitzchak (just as the first bracha of Shmoneh Esrei - "Magen Avraham" -- belongs to the Patriarch Avraham).]

This is what the Medrash teaches: Yitzchak's soul departed and it then returned. The Ari Hakadosh teaches us a mystical idea which we cannot fully understand, but at least we should be able to understand the basics of what he is saying. The Ari z"L teaches: The soul Yitzchak was originally born with was a "female soul", one dominated by "female characteristics" (neshama m'sitra d'nukva). That

is why up until the Akeidah (when he was already 37 years old), Yitzchak could not get married. It would be inappropriate to have a matrimonial match between two feminine souls. But, Ari z"l teaches, when Yitzchak's soul came back to him -- after having momentarily departed - - it came back as a masculine soul (sitra d'zuchra). Now and only now was Yitzchak able to find his destined life partner.

This explains a troubling phenomenon. Immediately after this dramatic parsha of Akeidas Yitzchak, the Torah concludes the narrative with a seemingly very anti-climactic set of pasukim: "And it happened after these matters that Avraham was told, saying: Behold, Milcah, she too, has borne children to Nachor, your brother: Uz, his firstborn, and Buz his brother; and Kemuel, the father of Aram; and Kesed and Chazo and Pildash and Yidlaph, and Besuel. And Besuel begot Rivka. These eight Milcah bore to Nachor; Avraham's brother. And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tevach, and Gacham, and Tachash, and Maachah." [Bereishis 22:20-24]

Why does the Torah write this? Isn't this a literary let down? Is there not extreme "loss of momentum" in the dramatic story that has just been told? In fact, it is particularly troubling that these last 5 Pesukim of Parshas Vayera are included in the Torah reading for Rosh HaShannah. It would be possible to break up the dramatic narrative of the Akeida into 5 Aliyos on Rosh HaShannah without resorting to including these pasukim in the High Holiday Torah reading! Why were they included here at all, and especially why were they included on Rosh HaShannah?

The answer is that these 5 pasukim are not just miscellaneous genealogy. This is the climax of the Akeidah. Until now, Yitzchak could not get married. In fact, there was no mate for Yitzchak in the world because he was a "female" (however we are to interpret that idea). Now that his soul had departed and come back to him as a "male soul", he was ready to seek a mate. Therefore, it is essential that the Torah conclude the story by telling us that Besuel fathered Rivkah. Now there is a next generation matriarch. Now there is a future for the Jewish people.

The Ari z"l points out further that the Haftorah of Parshas VaYerah [Melachim II 4:1-37] is the story of Elisha and the Shunnamite woman, in which, again, the soul of the young son of the Shunnamite woman (who Chazal identify as the future prophet, Chabakuk) departs and is then returned by virtue of Elisha's personal intervention. Here too, Chazal say that Chabakuk originally had the soul of a female and when his soul was returned to him, he for the first time obtained the soul of a male. This is another connection between the parsha and the Haftorah, according to Ari z"l.

This is a phenomenon that happens quite often in Jewish history and indeed quite often in our own lives. Something happens to us which we think is the worst thing that could possibly happen to us. We panic and ask how are we ever going to get out of this? What is going to be with the future? What is going to be?

Avraham Avinu did not think like that because he was a believer, but when we read the story of the Akeida, we cannot help but think "What is going to be with the Jewish people? Yitzchak was

supposed to be the destined future of the legacy of Avraham. Now G-d is saying to kill him. What is going to be?" But as things turned out, this was not the end of the line, but rather this was the beginning of the line. Without this event, there would not have been a Jewish nation.

So many times throughout history, we see that which we thought was literally the worst thing that could happen, actually has salvation embedded within it. Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein (the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva) once said that on the very day Spain expelled its Jews (Tisha B'Av 1492), Columbus set sail for America. Historians record that there was such a traffic jam in the Spanish harbor of Jews trying to get out of Spain that Columbus' ships were delayed in exiting the harbor.

At that point in time, it seemed that Spain was sealing the fate of the Jewish people. In terms of numbers and accomplishments, Spain was the capital of world Jewry at that time in history. The very Spain that was dooming us was in fact laying the groundwork for that which would save Jews almost 500 years later. Four hundred and more years after Columbus, America took in millions and millions of Jews when Jews were being massacred in Russia, in Poland, in Europe and around the world. Even when Jews were trying to escape Nazi Germany - we wished America would have been more "open" at the time - but there are still thousands of Jews who came to these shores.

The very Spain that sealed our fate was just opening another chapter. This is the way Divine Providence works. We hear proverbial stories of people who miss their planes because of flat tires or traffic jams and they later hear the plane they missed crashed and all aboard were killed. In such cases, it takes just a few hours to appreciate the Hand of G-d.

Divine Providence is not always that obvious. Sometimes it takes years or decades and sometimes it takes centuries or millennia to appreciate the "Hand of G-d" in the life of the Jewish nation - individually and collectively. But this is the way Hashgocha works: When we think we are coming to the "end", this is really the beginning. The seeds of Salvation are planted within the very midst of calamity and despair.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayera are provided below:

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