Parshas Toldot · 5787

TIME TO BECOME AWE-INSPIRED

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

I have a friend who spent years working on writing an amazing book about how to overcome any fear. The only problem is I can't convince him to publish it because... he's afraid nobody will buy it.

STAND IN AWE

One of the most talked-about questions in parshas Toldos, concerns the very first verse: "These are the generations of Yitzchok, son of Avrohom: Avrohom begot Yitzchok" (Bereishis 25:19). You don't need to be a genius to understand the question everyone is discussing: the redundancy in the verse. Why does the verse repeat itself? Isn't it obvious that if Yitzchok is "son of Avrohom," then "Avrohom begot Yitzchok"? Could it be otherwise?

This question is so ancient that even Rashi and his predecessors, the Medrashic sources, offer several different answers to it. This week we will look at the Chassidic and Kabbalistic explanation behind the verse, and its direct connection to the true and complete Geula.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains in his work (Ohr HaTorah, Toldos, p. 136b. See Likutei Sichos vol. 5, p. 366) that Avrohom, in his supernal root, represents the sefira of Chesed, whose emotional expression is love, as it says: "the seed of Avrohom, who loved Me" (Yeshaya 41:8). Avrohom served Hashem through the attribute of Chesed, which was expressed in his deep love for G-d, a love he also bequeathed to each and every one of us. Yitzchok, by contrast, in his supernal root represents the sefira of Gevura, whose emotional expression is fear/awe, as expressed in the verse: "and the Fear of Yitzchok was with me" (Bereishis 31:42). Yitzchok served Hashem through the attribute of Gevura, which was expressed in tremendous awe and reverence of the Creator, and this too he left to us as an inheritance.

Each of these two emotions, love and fear, is divided into two general levels. Within fear there is yirah tataah (lower fear), the initial, beginning level of fear, also known as "accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven," and in contrast, the more elevated and exalted fear called yirah ilaah (higher fear). Within love there are also two general levels. There is love

"on a low flame," ahava zuta (minor love), and as the feeling of love intensifies and grows, it is called ahava raba (great love).

The order of a person's inner service is as follows. First of all, "the beginning, essence, and root of the service" is the emotion of lower fear. Before a person accepts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, there is nothing to discuss; he hasn't even begun his path in holiness. After lower fear comes the positive emotion of minor love: love of G-d that is well reasoned, arising from understanding and grasping the nature of G-dliness. After a person has reached the completion of the lower levels of his service (lower fear and minor love), he can now reach the higher levels, but here the order switches. First comes the positive emotion of great love, and only after that does a person reach the ultimate self-nullification before G-d, the ultimate devotion to the Creator, through the emotion of higher fear.

The upshot of all the above is that the order of a person's service is: lower fear, minor love, great love, higher fear. If we look again at the verse, we see that this fits with the double, repeated mention of Avrohom and Yitzchok. As mentioned, Avrohom represents love of G-d, while Yitzchok represents fear of G-d. In the verse, Avrohom and Yitzchok are mentioned twice, in the following order: Yitzchok (fear), Avrohom (love), Avrohom (love), Yitzchok (fear). This double mention comes to teach us the order of service required of each of us. First, "Yitzchok," lower fear; then "Avrohom," minor love; then again "Avrohom," great love; and finally "Yitzchok," higher fear!

Moreover, we find this same double order every single day in the Siddur, the prayer book. The order of prayer is likewise built in levels, like the rungs of a ladder. Tefilla is called a "ladder" because through tefilla, the ladder, the soul climbs up and connects to G-d. This daily climb includes four rungs, corresponding to the four levels of emotion we have discussed. Before prayer, a person must accept upon himself "the Kingdom of Heaven," the emotion of fear. This is the first level, without which a person cannot approach G-d.

Afterwards comes the section of prayer called Pesukei D'Zimra (Verses of Praise), in which a person is meant to awaken feelings of love for G-d, a love built on his understanding of G-d's greatness and His infinite love for the Jewish people. Afterwards, in the blessings of the Shema and the recitation of the Shema, a person reaches a higher level in the love of G-d, great love, "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might," until the Amida prayer, in which he stands "like a servant before his master," in total self-nullification and higher fear, before the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He! Here too, in prayer, we see this structured order of the four rungs: Yitzchok (lower fear, the beginning of the prayer),

Avrohom (minor love, Pesukei D'Zimra), Avrohom (great love, the blessings of the Shema and the Shema), Yitzchok (higher fear, the Amida)!

TOTALLY AWESOME

In light of all these explanations, it emerges that the stature of Yitzchok our forefather is greater than that of Avrohom our forefather. The reason the first verse of the parsha ends with Yitzchok's name is that Yitzchok's spiritual level surpasses the spiritual level of his father Avrohom. This superiority is rooted in the fact that, according to Kabbalah, the sefira of Gevura has an absolute advantage over the sefira of Chesed, and this advantage is expressed in Yitzchok over his father Avrohom.

The superiority of Gevura over Chesed is one of the wondrous innovations of the Geula. Even now Gevura has an advantage over Chesed, but at present, during the exile, in order to bring this advantage to expression and revelation, Gevura must receive from Chesed. As we saw above, only through the completeness of the attribute of Chesed (minor love and great love) can a person reach the highest level of fear, higher fear. For the superiority of Gevura in the present time is hidden and concealed, and the way to it passes only through the attribute of Chesed. But in the era of the Geula, the superiority of Gevura will be revealed on its own. It will not need to be nullified to Chesed, nor will it require being revealed through Chesed; it will be revealed in all its glory, alone.

Why?

The Tzemach Tzedek explains that during the exile, the main service of man is the work of refinement (birurim): to refine and elevate the sparks of holiness embedded in the physical world. Refining and elevating the lower to the higher is accomplished by the higher allowing itself to descend to the lower. Only when a person is willing to lower himself and engage with lowly matters can he refine the lower in its own place. Therefore, now, in the time of exile, we need the attribute of Chesed, the ability to descend to another, to relate to the other and help him, in order to elevate and refine him. In contrast, in the time of the Geula, the main service of man will be the "work of unifications" (yichudim). This will be service without engaging with evil or with the lowly, because there will be no evil to engage with. Then, in the Geula, when our service will focus solely on matters of pure holiness, we will be able to use the attribute of Gevura in its full strength, and then we will discover how Gevura has a wonderful advantage over the attribute of Chesed.

In summary, the first verse of the parsha teaches us about the superiority of Gevura and its being the main thing in the Geula. Even today, we must reveal the Gevura within ourselves and use it correctly (toward ourselves, of course, and not toward others, G-d forbid!), and thereby help bring about the revelation of Gevura's superiority in the Geula, truly now!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

And we will conclude with a story of Jewish strength in the observance of mitzvos. Several years ago, the shliach Rabbi Shlomo Deutch of the city of Samara in Russia invited the mohel Dr. Yeshaya Shafit of the organization "Bris Yosef Yitzchok" to perform circumcisions in the city.

One of those who were to undergo the circumcision was a very special boy, about to turn 13, who decided to have a circumcision in honor of his Bar Mitzva.

When this boy learned that a mohel had come to the city especially, he decided, despite his fear, to show up and undergo the bris.

As he lay on the table, he suddenly began to say, "I'm very afraid, but I must do this mitzva for G-d!" and he repeated the sentence several times.

During the bris, the shliach called another young man, aged 16, to persuade him to have a bris as well. The boy, who at that very moment was in the middle of the procedure, took the receiver and said to the 16-year-old: "What are you afraid of? It's nothing! You have to do this for G-d!" And if that wasn't enough, at the end of the procedure the boy went up to the shliach and informed him that there were less than two months left until his Bar Mitzva, and asked whether he could put on tefillin that day for the first time...

After he finished putting them on, he asked the shliach for help buying tefillin, promising that he would put on tefillin all his life. Rabbi Deutch of course helped the boy, who had been "born anew," and gave him a gift of a beautiful pair of tefillin.

The Jewish strength of a child!

Good Shabbos!