

SECLUSION, SERVICE, AND SACRIFICE

ותהר ותלד שרה לאברהם בן...ויקרא אברהם את שם בנו...יצחק¹

*T*he תורה famously starts with the creation of the world, as opposed to the first מצוה. One reason this is so is because the תורה follows the Creation by delineating the stories of the אבות, which we are supposed to learn lessons to our everyday lives from. On that note, it seems interesting that while אברהם and יעקב respectively take up a fair portion of ספר בראשית, very little is said about יצחק. It's even more noteworthy that when we read the story of יצחק, we refer to it as one of the ten נסיונות of אברהם! What exactly is this very vague recounting of the life of יצחק supposed to teach us?

I believe the answer, as well as a major foundational point, is pointed out by Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky.² He discusses how each of the אבות had a certain מדה that they excelled in, and that was how they continued the מסורה. As is well known, אברהם is the paradigm of חסד. He was able to go out, and be מקרב others. He would bring them in to his home, give them to eat, and educate them about the idea of הקב"ה and monotheism. On the other hand, יעקב exemplified the מדה of אמת (as evidenced by the name of the ספר we are quoting, ליעקב, אמת). From a young age, we are taught to distinguish between true and false. Therefore, the only part יעקב had to do was convince people that הקב"ה was the true G-d. יעקב also championed the מדה of תפארת, splendor. יעקב combined these 2 מדות to show what הקב"ה is all about. We know from the גמרא³ that the seal of הקב"ה is אמת. This means that just as the letters of אמת are the beginning, middle, and end of the Hebrew alphabet,⁴ so too הקב"ה is all-encompassing.⁵ What, then, was יצחק's special מדה? This was the מדה of גבורה, strength.

יצחק wasn't about going out and being מקרב, but about working from within. In order to transmit the מסורה to the next generation, one has to be worthy. Self-improvement can sometimes necessarily involve a degree of isolation, where one removes distractions and stays focused on one goal. להבדיל, we see many examples of this in other areas of our contemporary world. If someone wants to excel in basketball, it involves a lot of practice. The extent to which practice is necessary in order to attain mastery precludes spending a lot of time on other activities. It also mandates a change in regular activities, such as eating healthier and getting more sleep. In order to work on one's self to the extent that יצחק did, any external influences would just be an impediment to his growth. That's not to say that there are no positive influences in our world, and that we should go into isolation. As the אמת יעקב points out, the levels יצחק reached are too much for us to handle. We need to be a bit less intense, but we should still pick out those influences that are bad and distance ourselves from them. Because יצחק was able to attain those lofty levels, he was able to reach the point where his עבודה was an unwavering commitment to that which הקב"ה asked, and to the umpteenth degree. That is why he

¹ בראשית כא.ב-ג

² אמת ליעקב בראשית כה.יט

³ שבת נה.

⁴ עיין בראשית רבה פא.ב

⁵ רש"י שבת נה. ד"ה "חותמו"

SECLUSION, SERVICE, AND SACRIFICE

was able to pass the toughest test, putting his life on the line to fulfill רצון ה' הקב"ה. However, even though we will never reach the levels of יצחק אבינו, he has passed on the trait of being ready to be מוסר נפש for our religion, a trait which we have unfortunately had to exhibit many times in our history.

The story of יצחק עקידת may have been a test for אברהם, but it was ultimately יצחק who almost took the hit, and we are here today because of him. While there is not much about יצחק in the תורה, this is his legacy. The עקידה has become a central focus of our mission statement, and a זכות we invoke not just in the תפילות of ראש השנה, but a זכות we invoke every morning in the קרבנות. Really, if the הקב"ה חסד from קרבן we bring as a חסד, it should be us on the מזבח. However, the animal takes the place of the person, because we are given the chance to do תשובה. According to יצחק's standards, in a world of strict דין, he needed to be placed on the מזבח. However, the הקב"ה stepped in and saved him. When we sin, we should take this message to heart. Really it should be us, and the fact that we read the עקידה every day is a testament to this very message. We constantly invoke the זכות of the עקידה, and ask the הקב"ה that just as He had mercy on יצחק, so too He should have mercy on us. אם ירצה השם we should never have to reach the stage of being קידוש השם like יצחק, and we should soon see the day where we will again be able to offer קרבנות.

⁶ רמב"ן ויקרא א.ט (וגם הובא בספר החינוך צה)