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The Role of Yitzchak Avinu

In this week's *parsha, Parshas Toldos*, we learn about the lives, home, struggles, children, and events that occur to Yitzchak and Rivka, the second patriarch and matriarch of Am Yisrael.

The *parsha* opens with Yitzchak and Rivka's long wait for a child. We see them davening - each one standing in their own corner - beseeching HKB"H to grant them a child. Unlike Avraham, his father, and Yaakov, his son-to-be - both of whom married more than one woman - Yitzchak, due to his nature as the *olah temima*, could not marry other wives (and, unlike his father and son, he could not depart from the Holy Land). Hence, the Sages teach us that he would stand in one corner and pray and she would stand in the opposite corner and pray. Together, they longed for a child to carry on the great truth and way of life begun by Avraham and Sarah.

Ultimately, after twenty years of marriage, Yitzchak's tefilos were accepted, Rivka conceived, and after the term of her pregnancy was over, she gave birth to twins. While Eisav would not carry on the heritage of his father and grandfather, nor would he receive the blessings granted to the firstborn, Yaakov would do so. And through Yaakov, the twelve tribes were born, and the family that began in Canaan became the great nation of Israel.

Yitzchak himself is a very interesting Torah personality. Compared to his father and his son - both of whom we know so much about - we know relatively very little about Yitzchak.

Avraham's narrative begins at the end of Parshas Noach (Bereishis 11) and continues through his death in Chayei Sarah (Bereishis 25). Yaakov's journey begins in Toldos, at the end of Bereishis 25 when Eisav sells him the rights to the firstborn in exchange for lentil soup. And Yaakov's story does not end till the end of Sefer Bereishis, when his sons bury him in the Cave of the Machpela (Bereishis 50).

In contrast to them, we meet Yitzchak in Vayeira. We learn about his birth, the bris milah that was done to him, the great feast held when he was weaned, and the journey with his father to the Akeidah. In Chayei Sara, in the Torah text we are not even told if he was present when his mother was mourned for, eulogized and buried. In the next chapter, a wife is found for him



and brought home to him. And in Toldos, we are told very little about Yitzchak. He prays for a child, he travels in Gerar, the shepherds quarrel with him as he digs wells, and he is forced to move. Finally, he gives the brachos to Yaakov who is dressed in Eisav's hunting garments (then gives brachos to a distraught Eisav), and then sends Yaakov away.

Yitzchak is a mostly quiet, unassuming, very little-is-known-about-him Torah personality. For one of the avos who founded our nation - especially in contrast to the plethora of details that we know about Avraham and Yaakov - this seems very surprising. Most of the events of Yitzchak's life are occurrences that others seem to do to him or concerning him, while he himself is mostly passive.

Furthermore, the first pasuk of the parsha tells us: וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת יִצְחָק בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם אַבְרָהָם הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִצְחָק, *And these are the offspring of Yitzchak the son of Avraham; Avraham birthed Yitzchak* (Bereishis 25:19). Rashi comments that Yitzchak's face and features resembled those of his father, so everyone knew Yitzchak was the son of Avraham, and Avraham begot Yitzchak.

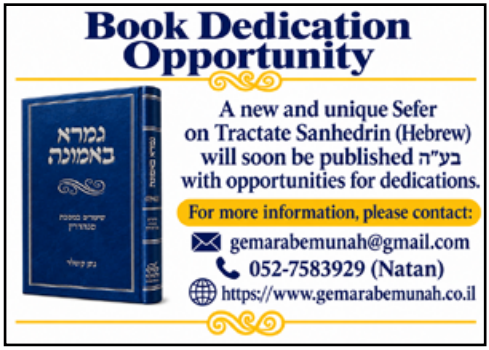
This resemblance, between father and son, was more far-reaching than a simple physical resemblance. When comparing the lives of father and son, we find that much of what happened to Avraham happened to Yitzchak.

Avraham was childless for many years, Yitzchak was too. Avraham had a son who was wicked and a son who was righteous, Yitzchak did too. Avraham dug wells, Yitzchak dug the same wells. Avraham and Sarah traveled to the region of Avimelech, king of Gerar, Yitzchak and Rivka did as well. Avraham faced a famine in the land, Yitzchak did too. Avraham said about Sarah, "she is my sister," Yitzchak said the same about Rivka. And both Avraham and Yitzchak had to send their sons away (albeit for different reasons).

How, then, can we understand the Torah's message about Yitzchak? As one of the Avos - the one who was the holy Akeidah no less - his life surely leaves us with foundational, impactful and crucial lessons about our own lives as *ovdei Hashem*.

With penetrating insight, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l notes that, "Isaac is the least original of the three patriarchs. His life lacks the drama of Abraham or the struggles of Jacob... Isaac 'reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he *gave them the same names* his father had given them.'

"Normally we strive to individuate ourselves by differentiating ourselves from our parents. We do things differently, or even if we don't, we give them different names. Isaac was not like this. He was content to be a link in the chain of generations, faithful to what his father had started. Isaac represents the faith of persistence,



the courage of continuity. He was the first Jewish child, and he represents the single greatest challenge of being a Jewish child: to continue the journey our ancestors began, rather than drifting from it, thereby bringing the journey to an end before it has reached its destination" (Covenant & Conversation, Genesis, p.164).

Avraham was an innovator, who revolutionized the world with his recognition of Hashem as Creator, Sustainer and Provider of all. Yaakov was the man of the study halls of Torah, and then the hard-working shepherd, who birthed a nation.

Who was Yitzchak? He was *the bridge* between them. His role was not to innovate, revolutionize, nor discover new horizons. His role was to carry the past, faithfully, into the future, so the nation begun by Avraham, and birthed by Yaakov, would continue forevermore.

We are not all innovators, inventors, or revolutionaries, as was Avraham. We are not all the fathers of great things born, as was Yaakov, the father of the tribes of Israel.

However, like Yitzchak, we are all - can, should and must be - a bridge from our glorious past to the bright light of the horizon of the future.

In order for Am Yisrael to continue, strongly forging ahead, we need the courage of Avraham, the vision of Yaakov, and the steadfast, quiet tenacity of Yitzchak.

Let us each live our lives guided by these principles, as we carry the legacy of Am Yisrael, Toras Yisrael and the holiness of Eretz Yisrael forward, passing on to the future what we have been bequeathed from our past.

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