

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה ואלה תולדות יצחק פרשת תולדות, תשכ"ה מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Toledot

2 Kislev 5783, 26 November 2022¹

INSPIRATION AND RESPONSE, LOVE AND AWE

THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ISAAC THE SON OF ABRAHAM. ABRAHAM BEGAT ISAAC. The repetitions in this verse have provoked many comments². Since it says Isaac is the son of Abraham, why does it add that Abraham begat Isaac? And why are each of their names mentioned twice?

In Torah Or³ by Rabbi Shneur Zalman, and Torat Chaim, by his son Rabbi Dov Ber, it explains that Abraham signifies the 'masculine flow', the arousal from above, and Isaac the 'feminine flow', the arousal from below. Two points are being made.

First, that the arousal from below (Isaac) is a response, described as the 'son of', the arousal from above (Abraham). Secondly, the second stage of arousal from above, which now is a response to the arousal from below, affects the second stage of arousal from below so that it is stronger and will truly be productive. The Hebrew for of the word 'begat' could be translated as 'caused Isaac to give birth'. This is also hinted at in the beginning of this passage: the generations of Isaac are a result of his interaction with Abraham.

[This interpretation helps a person understand the process of 'inspiration'. Initially, the inspiration comes from beyond us ('from above'). This galvanizes the person into a response ('from below'), which leads to a stronger and more

¹ Maamar Ve-Eleh Toledot Yitzhak 5725 (1964). Printed in Dvar Malchut for Sedra Toledot 5776. It was edited by the Rebbe.

² For example, see Rashi on this verse.

³ Torah Or, Toledot, 17c-d.

overt input 'from above'. This results in empowering the person to achieve more mature and productive results for the future.]

Another explanation (by the Tzemach Tzedek⁴) is that Abraham is the quality of Kindness, which in the personal service of the individual is expressed as Love (of the Divine). Isaac represents Severity, which is expressed as Fear or Awe. Since Love and Fear each have two levels - Minor Love and Great Love, Minor Fear and Supernal Awe - the text mentions each of their names twice.

The order of Divine service, such as in prayer, is: minor or lower Fear, minor Love, great Love, Supernal Awe. This is also the order of the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, from below to above, and also the order of Prayer, which is described as 'a ladder standing on the ground, its top reaching heavenwards⁵' a movement from below to above.

In Prayer, first of all there is a mood of minor Fear, respect for the Divine and for Divine Law, which has to be there before one begins to pray. Because the special quality of Prayer is an expression of Love, while a basic sense of respect for the Divine, the minor fear, has to be constant in one's life, also during the entire day, apart from prayer.

After that, at the time of Prayer, one tries to arouse the feeling of Love. First the lower Love, which in Tanya is described as the love produced by contemplating G-d as expressed in the worlds. [This might be in the Pesukei d'Zimra section of the morning prayer, which speaks of G-d giving life to world and all within it]. After that comes the Great Love, which Tanya⁶ describes as love of G-d beyond the worlds. [In the process of Prayer, this might be felt in the blessings before the Shema, and the Shema itself].

After that in the Eighteen Benedictions, the Amidah, one reaches the Supernal Awe, absolute selflessness.

These four stages are hinted at in the series of names in the text: Isaac, Abraham, Abraham, Isaac, representing the initial minor Fear or Respect, then minor Love and Great Love, and finally Supernal Awe.

In both of these explanations, the highest and ultimate level is expressed by Isaac, whether the arousal from below which is fruitful in the first explanation, or the Supernal Awe in the second explanation.

⁴ Or Hatorah, Bereishis, vol.4, 818b.

⁵ Gen.28:12. See Zohar I 266b, Zohar III 306b.

⁶ See Tanya Part 1, ch.9

This emphasis on Isaac is found in the Talmud, in a passage⁷ which describes G-d saying to each of the three Patriarchs ‘your children sinned against Me’. Only Isaac truly defends Israel, responding ‘my children? They are also *Your* children!’.

The Tzemach Tzedek further explains that the power of Isaac, the movement from below to above, Awe, is because the movement from below to above has infinite possibility, because there is no upper limit. By contrast the spiritual movement from above to below is limited by our finitude.

This also explains the power of self-sacrifice for the Sanctification of the Divine Name, a movement upwards towards G-d, as distinct from the movement downwards of the study of Torah and observance of Mitzvot.

This idea also links with the blessing to Jacob found in the Sedra: ‘May Elokim give you the dew of Heaven and the fatness of the Earth’⁸. This powerful blessing comes from the Divine Name Elokim, signifying Gevurah, Severity. For it is through Severity (signified by Isaac) that the most intense radiance is drawn below.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

⁷ Shabbat 89b.

⁸ Gen.27:28.