

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ש"פ תולדות ער"ח כסלו תשח"י ד"ה ואלה תולדות יצחק בלתי מוגה
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AVRAHAM AND YITZHAK IN OUR LIVES

THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF YITZHAK THE SON OF AVRAHAM. AVRAHAM FATHERED YITZHAK. Why is this repeated? Clearly, if Yitzhak is the son of Avraham, then Avraham fathered Yitzhak. In addition one can ask, what does this mean in the spiritual service of each individual?

It is known that Avraham and Yitzhak represent Chesed, Kindness, and Gevurah, Severity. For Avraham is a 'Merkavah', a chariot for the Attribute Chesed, meaning that he was a complete expression of Chesed in a remarkable way. He expressed this in material terms by welcoming guests and giving them food and drink. In addition he expressed kindness in spiritual terms, by revealing G-dliness in the world, as it says 'And Abraham called on the Name of G-d of the world'² and the Sages say 'do not read *vayikra*, he called, but *vayakri*, he caused passers by to call on the Name of G-d. How? After people had eaten and drunk [in his inn], they would stand up to thank him. But he would say: did you eat my food? You ate food from G-d of the universe. Praise Him Who spoke and the world came into being.'³

This means, Avraham's service was to draw down and reveal the Attribute Chesed, Kindness. And Yitzhak was a Merkavah, Chariot, to the Attribute Severity, as the Torah refers to 'the Fear of Yitzhak'⁴.

¹ Maamar VeEleh Toledot Yitzhak 5718 (1957), taught by the Rebbe on Parshat Toledot, erev Rosh Chodesh Kislev. Printed in Dvar Malchut Toledot 5778. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Gen.21:23.

³ Sota 10a-b, Rashi to Gen.21:23, Vayera.

⁴ Gen.32:42, in Vayetze. 'Severity' and 'Fear' both relate to the Attribute Gevurah.

Now Avraham and Yitzhak, Kindness and Severity, also relate to Light and Darkness. As the Zohar⁵ explains, that when the Torah refers to Light it means Avraham, and when it refers to Darkness it means Yitzhak. For Avraham's role is to draw down the radiance and reveal it, which is the idea of Light; while Yitzhak's quality is Severity, meaning concealment and Darkness.

In Creation there were these two qualities, Light and Dark, as it says '[I am G-d Who] forms Light and Creates darkness'⁶ יוצר אור ובורא חושך. For Light means Revelation to those at a lower level, while Darkness signifies concealment. Hence the word Yotzer 'Forms' is used with Light, for one forms that which already exists. Thus too, the word Beriah, Creates, is used with Darkness, for the Darkness has not been hitherto revealed, and is as if created.

Let us consider the nature of Light and Darkness. Darkness does not mean simply that a certain thing is dark, so it cannot be seen, and then there is light, so it can be seen. 'Dark' means it is on a higher level which is beyond being seen, and when later it *is* seen, what is visible is only a gleam of its original nature.

The discourse explains that 'darkness' is a result of being closer to the source. Like a student who is close to the teacher and is totally focused on what the teacher is saying. At that time the student cannot communicate with anyone else and is 'dark'. But when the student is further away, and is no longer hearing the teacher's words, he or she is now able to transmit the teaching to others, and in that sense is shining a light to others.

Considered in this way, Avraham was further away from the source than Yitzhak. Hence Avraham was able to give light and inspiration to others, while Yitzhak was focused on the Divine.

In the Torah we see Yitzhak digging wells. This means seeking to access the Elokut, the G-dliness hidden within, and removing the obstacles so that it could be revealed. But Yitzhak himself remained comparatively hidden. By contrast, Avraham was at a greater distance from the Divine Source, and was able to reveal warmth, hospitality and awareness of the Divine to passers by.

This connects also with the twin themes of Love and Awe of G-d. The person who feels further away from the Divine is able to experience strong love of G-d, seeking to draw him closer. But the person who is very close to the Divine feels predominantly a sense of fear, or awe, and abnegation (*bitul*).

⁵ Zohar I, 141b.

⁶ In the blessings before the Shema, from Is.45:7.

At the same time the *direction* of love of the Divine should ideally be ‘downwards’, towards others, in order to make them love G-d. This is the deeper meaning of the command ‘you should love Hashem your G-d’⁷. The question has been asked: how can one command a person to love? One answer is, that the command can be interpreted as a command to contemplate the Divine, which would lead to love.

This is true, but the command does say ‘you should love Hashem your G-d’, not ‘you should contemplate G-d’ which will lead to love. This discourse presents the subtle idea that ‘you should love’ is advising that the direction of that love should be downwards, expressed as revelation and light to others, as in the case of Avraham. This should lead to making them love Hashem as well. Hence ‘you should love Hashem your G-d’ also means ‘you should make others love Hashem..’

Thus the service of Avraham was from above to below, while that of Yitzhak was from below to above. However the service of Yitzhak actually transforms the lower level and makes it more able to express the Divine quality, as in his digging of wells. The movement from above to below does not always change the lower level. An example is the Giving of the Torah which was a tremendous revelation from above – but it was followed by various negative events including sin and exile. But the image of Yitzhak digging wells expresses a real transformation taking place at the lower level.

Both Avraham and Yitzhak contribute to the nature of each Jew. We each have the power of Love of G-d and of Awe, with different kinds of inspiration. We need both, and in some ways it is the service of Avraham which comes first. Hence ‘Avraham fathered Yitzhak’.

But then we invest in the service of Yitzhak, in which we transform the lower world, so as to be able to make it be a true dwelling for the Infinite Divine.

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

⁷ Deut 6:5, in VaEtchanan (in the first paragraph of the Shema).