



עֵלֵי חַדְשׁ

Clilei HaChodesh

Cheshvan 5781

## Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

### Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges

Leonie Jacob

I've always felt that Avraham is the central character in the book of Bereishit, even though his story isn't the one to take up the majority of the *sefer*. He is, after all, the individual whom Hashem chose as the father of the Hebrew nation.

The Rambam, in the first chapter of *Hilchot Avodah Zarah*, tells us that Avram originally worshipped *avodah zara* with his parents and community. But he didn't just accept what he was told about what was happening around him; rather, he questioned and challenged until he was able to find the truth, that there is only one G-d. From that point on, Avram stood in opposition to the rest of humanity in order to stand up for truth even in the face of overwhelming popular belief and authority.

This is conveyed to us through the famous Midrash in which Avram stands up for truth in the face of the authority of his father Terach, by breaking all of the idols, and then standing up for truth in the face of the authority of King Nimrod despite the risk of being thrown into the fiery furnace. This desire to stand for truth culminates in his going so far as to stand up for what he believes even against Hashem – the ultimate Expert and Authority on good and evil – when he argues on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

What was it that gave Avram the strength and courage to stand up for truth against popular opinion and against authority, to overcome the challenge of following the crowd and thereby to take his place as the father of our nation?

I think an answer can be found in a fascinating omission in the Torah. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag points out that the entire book of Bereishit is structured around the idea of *toldot* – generations. The phrase "*Eleh toldot* – these are the generations" appears about 13 times in the book of Bereishit, each time acting almost as a reset button. Each time the world begins to deviate from Hashem's plan, there is a reset. Adam, Noach, and Bnei Noach each receive their own "*Eleh toldot*" verse. So do Yitzchak and Yaakov. The only significant character who does not get his own "*Eleh toldot*" is Avraham. At the very point that we would expect to

see "*Eleh toldot Avram*," we instead see "*Eleh toldot Terach*" – Avram's father.

What did Terach do to warrant his own "*Eleh toldot*"?

The Torah tells us that Terach began a trip towards the land of Canaan before Avram ever did. He understood that there was a need to leave Ur Kasdim, to move towards a goal. When Avram receives the command "*Lech lecha*" and goes to Canaan, he is actually continuing his father's legacy. Avram intuitively understands that his journey forward needs to build upon that which he had already received. Avram therefore remains connected and rooted to the past even as he goes forward. And so there is no further need for a reset button, for an *Eleh toldot Avraham*.

I believe that following in his father's footsteps helps Avraham to subsequently commit to Hashem's command at the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha. But the command also teaches him something else. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that the verse "*Lech lecha miartzecha, mimoladetcha umibeit avicha*" teaches us something deeper about Avram's journey – what he needed to do to truly go to himself, to be able to stand up for what he believed in. He needed to go *miartzecha, mimoladetcha umibeit avicha* – to leave the influence of his environment, to separate from the natural tendencies we all have for conformity and to move away from his family home. Hashem is teaching Avram that it takes an active negation of popular opinion, of fear and conformity, and to constantly be moving out of one's comfort zone in order to go forward in pursuit of self and truth. Having our roots in our past and a clear vision of our future allows us to go to ourselves.

We are living in a time filled with many challenges and obstacles. One of the less obvious challenges is the ongoing abandonment of truth – both historical and scientific. May Hashem give each and every one of us the strength to find truth, to stay committed to the truth, to continue the mission of those who came before us, and to not succumb to fear and conformity – so that we will be able to forge a positive future for ourselves, our families, and our community.

### Yitzchak Avinu: The Heroic *Shadchan*

Rabbi Moshe Berger

Parshas Chaye Sarah begins with the death of Sarah and culminates with Yitzchak marrying Rivka, a marriage which "consoled him after the loss of his mother" (24:67). This reference to his being consoled implies that until now – or perhaps, now more than ever – he had been grieving.

Why might Yitzchak's grieving for his mother have become more intense at this moment than it had been in the past? What follows is my attempt to "flesh out" the skeletal facts which appear in Rabbinic aggadic and midrashic sources.

The fuller passage in Bereshis chapter 24 reads:

*62 Now Isaac was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i, and he was dwelling in the land of the south.*

*63 Isaac went forth to converse in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching...*

*67 Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her.*

**And Isaac was consoled for [the loss of] his mother.**

Be'er Lachai Ro'i is associated with Hagar; it is where the angel met her and blessed her after she had fled from Sarah (14:13). Why did Yitzchak travel there? Rashi, citing Bereshis Rabbah 60:14, provides the following explanation:

"Coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i" – where he had gone to bring Hagar to Abraham, his father, that he should marry her.

The Torah records this marriage in 25:1, “Avraham took another wife and her name was Keturah,” and Rashi provides the following midrashic elaboration:

“Keturah” – This is Hagar. She was called Keturah because her deeds were as pleasant as incense (קֶטֶר), and because she tied (קָטְרָה), the Aramaic for “tied”) her opening, for she was not intimate with any man from the day she separated from Abraham.

What is the significance of the narrative’s description of Yitzchak “conversing in the field towards evening” after his trip to Be’er Lachai Ro’i? The Talmud (Berachos 26b) asserts that, through this act, Yitzchak “instituted” the Mincha prayer service, as he was the first to pray as evening approached.

Thus, Rashi cites the Aggadic tradition which states that Yitzchak had traveled to Be’er Lachai Ro’i in order to enable Hagar to remarry Avraham. The Talmud teaches that following that remarriage, Yitzchak went out to “converse” (pray) in the field.

What moved Yitzchak, according to this tradition, to seek out God in prayer precisely at this moment? Also, what is the significance of the fact that it was the Mincha service that he initiated?

I imagine that, after Sarah died, Avraham and Yitzchak mourned her together. Having someone with whom to grieve, someone who feels the loss and yearns for the departed as much as you do, is consoling. The pain is both shared and validated.

Eventually, however, Yitzchak arrived at the realization that although no one could replace Sarah as a mother for him, Hagar was available as a wife for his father. Avraham had divorced her with reluctance, due to Sarah’s insistence – reinforced by Hashem’s command to “listen to her voice.”

Now the reality had completely changed. Sarah was gone. Yishmael was no longer a threat to Yitzchak; they were both grown men. Hagar, whose “deeds were as pleasant as incense,” had never remarried, but remained loyal to Avraham despite the divorce. Yitzchak, therefore, concluded that he should endeavor to bring an end to his father’s grieving and encourage Hagar to return.

I can only imagine the dialogue between Yitzchak and Hagar in Be’er Lachai Ro’i:

**Hagar:** *Yitzchak! What brings you to my tent?*

**Yitzchak:** *I have come because my mother passed away.*

**H.** *Oh. My condolences. But – why have you come to see me?*

**Y.** *I have come because I want you to return Canaan and remarry Father.*

**H.** *But your mother hated me! She had Yishmael and me banished!*

**Y.** *True. But that was then! Now – unfortunately – Mother is no longer a consideration, and my father did not share her negative feelings towards you. God had commanded him to obey her, so he had no choice but to banish you. You bore him his first son, whom*

*he loves. And you have remained loyal to him. Why should you both be alone, and lonely? Allow me to escort you back to so you can re-join him!*

Hagar consented. She returned, and she and Avraham remarried. Avraham’s intense grieving was now over.

And Yitzchak? He was now bereft of his “mourning partner”; he no longer had anyone in the world to share, understand, and thus validate his pain. Yitzchak had understood that, if his attempt to broker the marriage were to be successful, he would be left to mourn alone. Nevertheless, he chose to prioritize his father’s happiness, even at the cost of his own increased anguish.

Then, in the midst of his existential loneliness, Yitzchak realized that Hashem is always ready to plumb the depths of the distressed soul, as long as that soul is willing to “invite” Him in. So, as the daylight was about to disappear and the “shadows of eventide grew longer,”<sup>1</sup> he ran out to the field, alone – divorced from human company – and allowed Hashem to enter.

הַשֶּׁלֶךְ עַל-הָ' יִהְיֶה וְהוּא יִכְלֹקֶנָּה לֹא-יִתֵּן לְעוֹלָם מוֹט לְצַדִּיק.

*Cast upon Hashem your burden, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the faltering of the righteous.* [Ps. 55:23]

Yitzchak’s sacrificial act of lovingkindness was rewarded by Hashem as soon as he began to pray:

*63 Isaac went forth to converse (pray) in the field towards evening, and he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, camels were approaching...*

*67 Isaac brought her to the tent of Sarah his mother, and he took Rebecca, and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted for [the loss of] his mother.*

Just as he caused his father’s pain to be assuaged, Hashem did the same for him.

#### **Mincha and the death of a parent:**

It is still daylight – but the shadows are relentlessly growing longer. Total darkness will reign before the light returns.

*Because I could not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me...*

*We passed the fields of gazing grain,*

***We passed the setting sun.***

*We paused before a house that seemed*

*A swelling of the ground... [Emily Dickenson]*

Hashem is the ultimate Marriage Broker.

*She became his wife, and he loved her.*

The debilitating, terrifying night, with God’s help, ultimately transforms into a new day.

<sup>1</sup> See Yirmiyahu 6:4.

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**This month’s issue of Clilei HaChodesh is sponsored in honor of all of those who helped to make for very meaningful davening over the Yamim Noraim and Sukkot while making sure everything went smoothly.**  
***May Hashem continue to keep us safe and healthy.***

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