

Daily Teaching
18 Kislev 5768
Wednesday, November 28, 2007

Vayeishev #4

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

In spite of all that we have explained so far regarding the difference between Jacob's ability to sustain the experience of higher fear and Isaac's ascent into God as a result of the same experience, there is a verse that reads: "Isaac dwelt in Grar."¹ This verse has the same format as the first verse in our *parshah* from which Rebbe Hillel began his explanation: Jacob dwelt in the land of the dwellings of father...."² In fact, the name of the place where Isaac dwelt, Grar גרר shares a common linguistic root with the word "dwellings of" מגורי, which was the word that was explained to mean both fear and storage. So we are pretty much faced with the same question once more: What is the difference between Isaac and Jacob's experience of higher fear?

To answer this question we need to read closely Rebbe Hillel description of higher fear. Let us quote the relevant passage once again:

...this type of fear is a vessel for the essence of life, the essence of the Infinite. What they mean to say is that it allows one to take pleasure from Him, higher and higher, and this is what is said in the *Tikunei Zohar* that awe is a storage bin for wisdom, i.e., to the wisdom that is concealed within the essence, etc.

Rebbe Hillel actually defines the experience of higher fear (i.e., awe of God) in two different ways, and as we shall see, even though he says that they are the same, he brings both because they are not one hundred percent equivalent. The first is that it is "a vessel for the essence of life, the essence of the Infinite." This is the manner in which Jacob experienced higher fear, with the stress being on its role as a vessel. The second is that "it allows one to take pleasure from Him, higher and higher." This is the manner in which Isaac experienced higher fear, with the stress being on its infinite progression—"higher and higher"—as the pleasure experienced in God has no end.

Let us now explore each of these experiences in greater detail.

Isaac's ascent

Isaac's awe of God was experienced as a never-ending ascent to higher and higher levels of pleasure in God. This is the special quality of the *sefirah* of might, of which Isaac is the archetypal soul. The person who has a strong *sefirah* of might is always on the move, always advancing forward without rest and without peace of mind. This does not have to mean that such a person is not grounded, rather, that as much as he is connected with



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the reality of the world, he is always in search of something better.³ The source of the *sefirah* of might is in the second head of the crown, called the head of nothingness (רישא (דאיני), which is experienced as pleasure. Thus, the rectified mode of movement for someone of this nature is to constantly seek new levels of pleasure in the Almighty. Pleasure in the Almighty is especially related to the experience of Shabbat, as Isaiah says: “Then you shall take pleasure in God...”⁴ In Kabbalah, the infinite levels of pleasure available in the world are explained to be the result of God’s infinite pleasure in the Torah; in the language of the *midrash*: “For two thousand years before the world was created, the Almighty took pleasure in the Torah.”⁵

We mentioned that, in general, when experiencing awe of God a person experiences a dissonance between body and soul. The soul ascends back to its source in God, while the body flees downward into physical reality. The rectified state of pleasure enjoyed by Isaac is possible when the corporeal experience of the body is sublimated, and actually negated, by the spiritual ascent of the soul. To use a mathematical description: the contradictory movements of the soul and the body are like two vectors directed 180 degrees apart. When these two vectors are of equal length, they cancel each other out. The result is a state of balance. Likewise, Isaac’s experience of awe of God resulted in a what looks like a balanced constitution externally, but internally includes two equal and opposite forces, with the downward force of the body eventually sublimating itself into the upward motion of the soul, resulting in laughter and enjoyment. Isaac’s state can be described as an awareness of opposite forces in one’s being, which are balanced out by the consciousness itself. Indeed, the *gematria* of “Isaac dwelt” וישב יצחק is equal to the *gematria* of “consciousness” מודעות, i.e., consciousness that carries opposites.

Akudim

It is important for us to correspond this description of Isaac with an already established model of Kabbalah. As described in the Arizal’s teachings, the first creation after the contraction of God’s infinite light is *Adam Kadmon* (lit., primordial man). The first World emanated from *Adam Kadmon* is *Akudim*, which literally means “bound,” because all the *sefirot* were bound into a single vessel. Indeed, its name, *Akudim*, already associates it with Isaac, whose formative experience was his binding on the altar by his father (in Hebrew this is called עקידת יצחק, the Binding of Isaac). Furthermore, the Arizal describes that because there is only one vessel in the World of *Akudim*, the *sefirot* do not reside within it, but rather hover in and out in a state called *matei velo matei*, meaning “touching and not touching.” In other words, the descent of the lights of the *sefirot* into the one vessel, the downward vector of the *sefirot* called “touching” is cancelled by their upward vector called “not touching,” which takes them out of the vessel. This is exactly the same description as the state of Isaac’s dwelling. Indeed, the one vessel of the *Akudim* symbolizes the Land of Israel, the only place that Isaac was permitted to dwell in (as

opposed to Abraham and Jacob who were commanded at certain times to live outside the Land of Israel).

Atzilut

Now we can recognize Jacob's dwelling as similar to the dwelling of the *sefirot* each in its own individual vessel in the World of *Berudim*, or the World of *Atzilut* (Emanation), the world of rectification. In the World of *Atzilut*, the lights completely enter and reside within their respective vessels. This is the fully rectified state.

The word for "rectification" in Hebrew is תְּקִין, which in Aramaic means "enclothement," indicating that each light has its own garment, i.e., its own vessel and is fully clothed in it.

Likewise, the *partzufim* in the World of *Atzilut* enclothe within one another. Following suit, when it attains a consciousness of the World of Emanation, the soul is able to be enclothed in the body, for all eternity, the secret of the eternal life of the future. From our current perspective, this is final state of fulfillment, which is what we mean when we say: "[You shall give] truth (i.e., fulfillment) to Jacob."⁶ And, for this reason the sages say that "Jacob did not die."⁷ Indeed, in Hebrew the first phrase is just a permutation of the second: יַעֲקֹב לֹא מָת = אִמַּת לִיעֲקֹב.

When a person reaches the consciousness of the World of *Atzilut* there is no experience of contradiction between the spiritual and the material. The two vectors do not cancel one another but form one greater experience, as the upward, spiritual vector is enclothed within the downward, material one.

As we say in the Shabbat morning prayers: "And all hearts will fear You, and all innermost parts and kidneys shall sing to Your Name." The heart fearing God represents the fleeing of the soul downward. The song to God of the innermost parts and kidneys represents the ascent of the soul in its (pleasurable) longing to become one with God.

Mathematically, the words יִירָאוּךָ ... יִזְמְרוּ לְשִׁמְךָ "will fear You... shall sing to Your Name" is equal to 900, or 30^2 , the secret of the Jewish heart, as explained in length elsewhere.⁸ The other words in this phrase וְכָל הַלְּבָבוֹת ... וְכָל קָרְבַּי וְכָלֵיט "all hearts... all innermost parts and kidneys" equal 1331, or 11^3 , which is also the numerical value of the *mispar keedmee* (מספר קדמי) of מְשִׁיחַ "*Mashiach*." Just וְכָל קָרְבַּי "all inner" is equal to 358, מְשִׁיחַ, "*Mashiach*."

¹. Genesis 26:6.

². Ibid. 37:1.

³. A continual state of mind reflected in the Yiddish adage: *az gut iz gut iz besser nit besser!*? – "if good is good is better not better!?"

⁴. Isaiah 58:14.

⁵. See Proverbs 8:30.

⁶. ???

⁷. ???

⁸. See <http://www.inner.org/goldjewelry/aboutjewelry/aboutmysticalheart.php>.