חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SUDILKOV · DEGEL MACHANEH EPHRAIM, LECH LECHA

Why did old age only begin with Avraham?

Degel Machaneh Ephraim

Avraham's constant exertion in his own attribute of chesed (kindness), called notzer chesed (one who preserves kindness) and associated with yemei olam (days of eternity), served to arouse and draw down the higher, greater chesed called rav chesed (abundant kindness) or yemei kedem (days of old) — also termed Atik Yomin (the Ancient of Days) — channeling these kindnesses down to the Shechinah (Divine Presence), referred to as Beit El. This is also why Chazal (our Sages) taught that zikna (old age, reflecting this quality of "atik") did not exist until Avraham, since it was he who first drew this elevated chesed into the world through his own devoted practice of kindness. AI SUMMARY

"And he moved from there to the mountain east of Beit El" (Genesis 12:8). One can say regarding this, by way of sod (hidden/mystical meaning): there is "notzer chesed" (one who preserves kindness) and "rav chesed" (abundant in kindness), and there are "yemei olam" (days of eternity) and "yemei kedem" (days of old). Notzer chesed corresponds to yemei olam, and rav chesed corresponds to yemei kedem. And it is known that Avraham's attribute is the attribute of chesed (kindness), which is notzer chesed; and through his constant striving in the attribute of chesed, he would arouse, by means of his own attribute of chesed, the rav chesed — the great chesed called yemei kedem. This, one can say, is the intent of the verse "and he moved from there... mikedem (from the east / from of old)" — meaning, from his attribute, the attribute of chesed, he aroused yemei kedem, which is rav chesed, and he drew down these kindnesses to Beit El, that is, to the Shechinah (Divine Presence), as it were, which Yaakov called Beit El.

And this, one can say, is the intent of the statement of Chazal (our Sages, may their memory be blessed): "Until Avraham there was no zikna (old age)" — for zikna corresponds to the attribute of chesed called "atik" (ancient), which is the great chesed, yemei kedem — until Avraham came, who strove in his attribute, the attribute of chesed, until he drew down the attribute of rav chesed, which is "Atik Yomin" (the Ancient of Days), so named after yemei kedem in the world, as mentioned above. And understand this.

