חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

AVRITCH · BAT AYIN, TOLDOT

Why did G-d answer Yitzchak's prayer for a child rather than Rivkah's?

Bat Ayin

Drawing on Rashi's comment that "by him" means the prayer of a tzaddik who is the son of a tzaddik is not like that of a tzaddik who is the son of a wicked man, Bat Ayin, citing a teaching of Rabbi Zev of Zhitomir, explains that G-d accepts prayer offered in humility, with a person making himself like the remnants of a song and relying on the merit of the forefathers. Yitzchak could pray on that merit, while Rivkah, the daughter of a wicked man, had to rely mainly on her own deeds, so G-d turned to Yitzchak's prayer. AI SUMMARY

"Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren; and Hashem let Himself be entreated by him" (Bereshit 25:21). Rashi explains: "by him," and not by her, because the prayer of a tzaddik (righteous one) who is the son of a tzaddik is not like the prayer of a tzaddik who is the son of a wicked man.

We can say about this as follows. I heard from the holy tzaddik, Rabbi Zev of Zhitomir, an explanation of the phrase "Who chooses songs of praise" (in the Yishtabach prayer). It means that the Creator of all worlds, blessed be He, chooses the remnants (shirayim) of song, that is, the one who makes himself like remnants at the time of song and prayer, and so forth. To understand this: the essence of divine service is humility and true lowliness. When a person stands to pray before the Creator of all worlds, blessed be He, he should reflect in his mind: "On account of my deeds I am not fit to speak a single word before Him, may He be blessed, or to ask anything of Him, great or small. On account of my deeds I do not even deserve an opening of the mouth to stand and ask before Him. I only ask the Blessed Creator to help me in the merit of my forefathers."

This kind of prayer is accepted before Him, may He be blessed, as the verse says (Tehillim 145:18): "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth." That is, Hashem is close to those who call upon Him, to accept their prayer, when they call upon Him in truth, meaning by the merit of the forefathers. Truth is the aspect of the forefathers: head, middle, end.

But this applies when he is a tzaddik the son of a tzaddik. Then he can ask Hashem by the merit of his forefathers. When he is a tzaddik the son of a wicked man, however, he cannot ask by the merit of his forefathers. His request must rest mainly on his own deeds. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not turn so readily to accept such a prayer, for He chooses only "songs of praise," that is, the one who makes himself like remnants.

Now Yitzchak was a tzaddik the son of a tzaddik, so his prayer rested only on the merit of his forefathers. Rivkah was a righteous woman, the daughter of a wicked man, and her prayer rested on her own merit. This is the meaning of "Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife": Yitzchak's entreaty and prayer stood "opposite" his wife, that is, in opposition to her prayer. Why was his prayer in opposition? The verse gives the reason: "because she

was barren." That is, in her prayer she herself was the main element (ikar), because she could not ask by the merit of the forefathers, as explained above. Therefore "Hashem let Himself be entreated by him." The Creator of the worlds, blessed be He, turned only to his prayer, because his prayer was only in the aspect of remnants, and the Holy One, blessed be He, chooses only the one who makes himself like remnants at the time of song and prayer.

This is what Rashi explained: the prayer of a tzaddik the son of a tzaddik is not like the prayer of a tzaddik the son of a wicked man. The former can ask by the merit of the forefathers and makes himself like remnants, so the Creator, blessed be He, turns to his prayer. The latter cannot ask by the merit of the forefathers, and he is the main basis of his own prayer. The Creator, blessed be He, chooses only "songs of praise," as explained above, in the aspect of humility. May it be His will that we merit this.

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