מדרש

Midrash

ON GENESIS 27:1

Why did aging and illness first appear with the patriarchs?

Bereshit Rabbah 65:9

In Bereshit Rabbah 65:9, Rabbi Yehuda bar Simon teaches that Avraham asked G-d for old age so that people would know whom to honor, Yitzchak asked for suffering so that the attribute of justice would not be outstretched against a person at death, and Yaakov asked for illness so that a dying man could settle matters among his children. G-d answers each request as a good one and begins the change with the patriarch, which is why aging, suffering, and illness first appear in the text with them. Rabbi Levi adds that Hezekiah asked for an illness from which one recovers, so that a person who falls ill again and again is moved to teshuvah (repentance). AI SUMMARY

Rabbi Yehuda bar Simon said: Abraham demanded aging. He said before Him: 'Master of the universe, a man and his son enter a place and no one knows which of them to honor. Because you adorn him with aging, a person knows whom to honor.' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'As you live, you have demanded a good thing, and it will begin with you.' From the beginning of the book until that point, aging is not written. When Abraham stood, He granted him aging – "Abraham was old" (Genesis 24:1).

Isaac demanded suffering. He said before Him: 'Master of the universe, a person dies without suffering, the attribute of justice is outstretched against him. When you bring suffering upon him, the attribute of justice is not outstretched against him.' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'As you live, you have demanded a good thing, and I will begin with you.' From the beginning of the book until here, suffering is not written. When Isaac stood, He granted him suffering – "it was when Isaac was old, and [his eyes] dimmed."

Jacob demanded illness. He said before Him: 'Master of the universe, a person dies without illness and does not settle matters between his children. When he is ill for two or three days, he settles matters between his children.' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'As you live, you have demanded a good thing, and it will begin with you' – "One said to Joseph: Behold, your father is ill" (Genesis 48:1).

Rabbi Levi said: Abraham introduced aging, Isaac introduced suffering, Jacob introduced illness, Hezekiah introduced illness that is cured. He said to Him: 'You would sustain one until the day of his death. But because a person is ill and recovers, is ill and recovers, he repents.' The Holy One blessed be He said to him: 'As you live, you have demanded a good thing.' That is what is written: "A composition of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he became ill and recovered from his illness" (Isaiah 38:9).

Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman said: From here [we learn], that between illness and illness, there was an illness that was more severe than both of them.