חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

GER · TOLDOT, SEFAT EMET

Why did Yitzchak have to dig his own wells?

Sefat Emet

The main teaching is that each of the Patriarchs was worthy in his own right, so Yitzchak could not simply inherit Avraham's spiritual attainments but had to dig out the straight path himself. Drawing on the Midrash, the Sefat Emet adds that every tikkun (repair) brings a new concealment and a stronger yetzer (inclination), so each generation must rise level by level, with Yitzchak's path rooted in yirah (awe) and gevurah (strength, severity) and Avraham's in chesed (lovingkindness) and love. AI SUMMARY

"And all the wells that his father's servants had dug... the Philistines stopped up... And Yitzchak dug again..." It is taught that only three are called "fathers," meaning Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. But this is difficult either way. If so, let us follow the first and call only Avraham a father. The reason, however, is that every tzaddik (righteous one) has merit through his forefathers, whereas each of the three Patriarchs was worthy on his own. So it is taught in the midrash (rabbinic homiletic teaching) on the verse "And I will remember My covenant with Yaakov...": each one was worthy on his own. Corresponding to this, the verse tells us here that all the illuminations that his father had attained were afterward stopped up, and Yitzchak was compelled to dig and clarify the straight path by himself.

This is also the meaning of "There was a famine in the land, besides the first famine." As the midrash teaches, there are ten famines in the world. That is, there are ten traits, corresponding to the ten utterances, which the tzaddikim must fulfill. As it is taught in Avot, "in order to give good reward to the righteous..." Avraham our father, peace be upon him, repaired the aspect of chesed and love, and he repaired the famine of his days. Afterward, "there was another famine." So too with Yaakov.

The truth is that after every tikkun a new concealment arises. This is also the meaning of "one people shall be stronger than the other." As our Sages (Chazal) said, whoever is greater than his fellow, his yetzer (inclination) is greater than his. So it is that the more a person repairs himself, the more the power of the yetzer and of the sitra achra (the "other side") against him increases. Through this he adds strength to overcome it, and he rises higher. This proceeds level after level; understand this. Likewise, had Avraham's way not become concealed, no one would afterward have sought a new way. Therefore "there was a famine," and Yitzchak needed to seek out for himself the way of yirah and gevurah.

[And it is written, "Do not go down to Egypt." For the deeds of the fathers ascend to benefit the children, so that they need not do everything in actuality. That is, Avraham went down to Egypt, and the Zohar explains that he needed to put himself into it in order to repair all the dangerous places, so as to nullify the famine that came from the sitra achra; see there. Yitzchak was prepared for this, and so he was told, "Do not go down..." For the preparation for it was sufficient.

This is the meaning of "He chooses their ways...": since he is prepared for the deeds of his fathers, he need not demonstrate it in actual deed. Only Avraham our father, peace be upon him, who was

the first to repair, needed to be tried with ten trials in actuality. This is the meaning of "because Avraham listened to My voice..." Therefore Yitzchak no longer needed to go down to Egypt in actuality, as above.] So too, in particular, with each and every person, who must repair all ten of the above levels.

And certainly Avraham our father, peace be upon him, had a true fear of Heaven, as it is written, "Now I know that you are a G-d-fearing man." As for his trait being chesed and love, it was through love that he came to awe, while Yitzchak came to love through awe. But all the traits are included in one another. This is the meaning of "Yitzchak, son of Avraham..." And so wrote the Ramban, of blessed memory: in the matters of this world (olam hazeh), love and awe contradict each other, since toward one whom a person loves, awe does not apply. But in the avodah (divine service) of G-d, love and awe are united. For true love is what brings one to awe, and likewise true awe is what brings one to love, as above.

Translation: translated by AI (anthropic/claude-sonnet-5.5)