חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

LIZHENSK · VAYERA, NOAM ELIMELEKH

Why is the Binding credited to Avraham rather than Yitzchak?

Noam Elimelekh

Noam Elimelekh explains why the Torah attributes the Binding to Avraham rather than Yitzchak, a question that earlier authorities had already raised. Avraham, whose attribute was chesed (lovingkindness), trusted that both would return, yet he went with mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice) as though he would truly slaughter his son, while Yitzchak, whose attribute was gevurah (strength, severity), wanted his ashes to be heaped up forever, so Avraham drew him to offer himself with a greater surge of strength than he had first intended, which is why the Binding is credited to Avraham. AI SUMMARY

"He said, 'Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Avraham said, 'God will see to the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'" The earlier authorities already raised the question of why the text attributes the Binding to Avraham and not to Yitzchak.

It seems to me that Avraham and Yitzchak both knew that it was not the intention of the Holy One, blessed be He, that Yitzchak be slaughtered. Avraham, whose attribute was chesed (lovingkindness), went in trust in God that the two of them would return, as it says, "we will worship and we will return to you." Nevertheless, they went with mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice), as though he were truly going to slaughter him.

This is the meaning of "he saw the place from afar." The word "the place" is a hint. Even though he saw that Yaakov would come forth from him, of whom it is said, "he encountered the place," he nevertheless kept this thought far from his heart, because he was going in his wholeness, as above.

This is what Yitzchak meant by "Here are the fire and the wood." That is to say, since you have done your avodah (divine service) and your kavanah (intention) in wholeness, as is fitting according to your attribute, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" That is to say, where is the lamb that should already have been prepared?

"Avraham said, 'God will see to it for Himself...'" Yitzchak went in his attribute of gevurah (strength, severity), and he wanted his ashes to be heaped up forever. So Avraham said to him that "the lamb will be seen" only when it is "for a burnt offering, my son." That is to say, according to your attribute, since you go in strength, the lamb will not be seen until you go up on the altar as a burnt offering. Then your thought, that your ashes be heaped up forever, will be fulfilled, and it is necessary to bind you on the altar and for you to stretch out your neck.

Therefore the text attributes the Binding to Avraham, because he induced Yitzchak to do his avodah with a greater surge of strength than what had been in Yitzchak's thought at the start. May the Binding of Yitzchak be remembered for us with mercy. Amen, so may it be God's will.

