



Torrent of Tears

When Rashi finds a difficulty in the text and offers more than one answer, we understand that he is unsatisfied with either resolution on its own. Moreover, it is highly unusual for Rashi to bring three answers to the same question. We find such a case in our *parashah*, as Rashi sheds light on the cause of Yitzchak Avinu's fading eyesight as he approached the end of his life.

Rashi first presents the explanation of the *Tanchuma*; Yitzchak's blindness was the result of the smoke in the idolatrous services conducted by Eisav's wives. Rashi then brings an alternative explanation offered by the *midrash Bereisheet Rabbah*; when Yitzchak Avinu was bound on the altar of the *Akeidah*, the heavens opened and the angels cried when they saw what was happening. Their tears fell into Yitzchak's eyes causing them to weaken as he aged. Finally, Rashi brings an additional explanation from the *Tanchuma*. Hashem caused Yitzchak's eyes to dim so that he would be unable to differentiate between Yaakov and Eisav and thus Yaakov could receive the appropriate blessings.

Why so many answers? Particularly, let us explore the account of the angels' tears that blinded Yitzchak Avinu.

Rav Weinberger in *Shemen Hatov* explains simply that Rashi is presenting us with a framework of past, present and future events. The *Akeidah* was a past incident, the activities of Eisav's wives occurred in the present and the *brachot* would be given in the future.

Rav Rivlin in *Sefer HaParshiyot* suggests that all three answers reflect different manifestations of Yitzchak Avinu's primary *middah* of *yir'ah* – awe of G-d. Whereas Avraham Avinu would have tried to influence the behavior of such daughters in law, Yitzchak Avinu withdraws further inward, as if blinding himself to the reality surrounding him. Next, the midrash teaches that Yitzchak Avinu spent a few years in Gan Eden after the experience of the *Akeidah*, rendering his vision other-worldly. Similarly, Rav Dessler *zt"l* notes, Yitzchak's quality of *gevurah* was linked to his son Eisav's *gevurah*, thus blinding Yitzchak from seeing Eisav's true essence. As such, it was necessary to employ deception so Yaakov could receive his due blessings. Here Rav Rivlin interprets Rashi's presentation to highlight how Yitzchak Avinu's defining characteristic shaped his entire life.

Interestingly, Rav Schwab notes that the angels' tears had an inverse effect on Yitzchak. In *Maayan Bet Hashoeva* he expounds on the midrash that cites a verse from *Yeshayahu* (33:7), referring to angels that cried as agents of peace. As the angels were moved by mercy to cry, the tears that

fell into Yitzchak's eyes embodied pure mercy, so much so that when he aged, he only saw Eisav with a "good eye" and was unable to see his wickedness.

But why, asks Rav Shmuel Birnbaum, did the angels cry at all? Couldn't they see from the heavenly perspective that all fits into a scheme of goodness? He answers that Hashem, as it were, opened the heavens and allowed the angels to see the *Akeidah* from an earthly vantage point where they could see the struggle, pain and confusion that moved them to tears. As a nation, we have shed so many tears, yet we must remind ourselves that our perspective is a limited, earthly one. May we merit to see things from the higher, heavenly viewpoint where full clarity reigns and there are no more tears. ■

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