

LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Shagalov

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume I: *Bereishit*

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In English rendition
with Introduction and Notes
by
Jacob Immanuel Schochet

A

I. On the verse 'And these are the progeny of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begat Isaac,'^a the commentators ask: what is the reason for repeating 'Abraham begat Isaac' after stating 'Isaac the son of Abraham'?

There is an explanation in the plain sense of the verse: The reality of a 'progeny of Isaac the son of Abraham' — (progeny literally, as well as in the sense of the Midrashic interpretation 'the real progeny of the righteous are their Torah and *mitzvot*'¹) — became possible because 'Abraham begat Isaac.'

II. A number of things first began with Isaac. For example, Isaac was the first to be circumcised at the age of eight days,^b and he was the first to become *bar-mitzvah* at the age of thirteen.

(Abraham was circumcised when he was already 99, and he did not become a *bar-mitzvah* at the age of thirteen. There are several opinions among our sages on how old Abraham was when he acknowledged the Creator: three years,² or forty years,³ or forty-eight years⁴ — but no one mentions the age of thirteen.)

a. [Genesis 25:19]

1. *Bereishit Rabba* 30:6; *Tanchuma*, and Rashi, beginning of *parshat* Noach.

b. [*Tanchuma*, Shemot: par. 4. Isaac was the first with whom the precept of circumcision was fulfilled perfectly, in all its details.]

2. *Nedarim* 32a.

3. Maimonides, *Hilchot Avodah Zara* I:3

4. *Bereishit Rabba* 64:4

Both these precedents are alluded to in the verse 'And the child grew and he was weaned (*vayigamal*), and Abraham made a great feast on the day of Isaac's being weaned (*higamel*).'⁵ According to one opinion,⁶ this feast was held on the occasion of the circumcision, as would seem indicated in the word *higamel*: the first half of this word is numerically equivalent to eight, and the latter half means circumcised, thus alluding to the circumcision which took place when Isaac was eight days^c. Another opinion⁷ interprets the word *vayigamal* to the effect that 'he was weaned from the *yetzer hara* to the *yetzer tov*'⁷ — which happens at the age of thirteen.^c

The *Midrash*^d states that the expression 'great (feast)' means that (1) the Great One of the Universe — G-d — was there. [This would concur with the verse 'My son, this day I have begotten you,'⁸ as interpreted by our sages⁹ to refer to the day of the *bar-mitzvah* of King David: G-d said 'I have begotten you,' that is, *I*, as it were, and not the *sitra achara* (the 'other side' — the side of evil, like *yetzer hara*) which prevailed until now. In other words, he was moved away from the *yetzer hara* to the *yetzer tov*.]

5. Genesis 21:8

6. *Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer*, ch. 29. *Tossafot*, *Shabbat* 130a, *s.v.* 'sas.'

7. *Bereishit Rabba* 53:10. Cf. commentary of Rashi on *Bereishit Rabba* 53:11, *s.v.* 'ben'.

c. [See *Avot deRabbi Nathan*, ch. 16, and *Kohelet Rabba* IV:13 (also *Midrash Tehilim* 9:5): The *yetzer hara* begins to develop in the mother's womb and is born with a person, as it is said 'For the disposition (*yetzer*) of man's heart is evil from his youth' (Genesis 8:21). The *yetzer tov* becomes part of man when the child turns thirteen. (Cf. *Zohar* I:79a, 79b f., 161b and 179a; *ibid.*, II:161b; and *Zohar Chadash*, *Bereishit*, 10c) At the age of thirteen (*bar-mitzvah*), therefore, the child is weaned from the *yetzer hara* to the *yetzer tov*. Note also the paragraph following in the text, citing *Zohar* II:98a.]

d. [*Bereishit Rabba*, *ibid.*]

8. Psalms 2:7

9. *Zohar* II:98a

(2) The word 'great' means that there was a feast for the great personalities: Og, King of Bashan, and all the great of that generation were present. All nations had appointed Abraham as their king,¹⁰ thus when Abraham made that feast he invited the various kings, including Og.

The *Midrash* relates further,¹¹ that Og said: 'Of what significance is he? I can crush Abraham's only son, Isaac, with one finger!' Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: 'By your life, you will yet see thousands and myriads of his descendants, and your fate will be to fall into their hands!'

III. The unique qualities of Isaac [circumcision at eight days and bar-mitzvah at thirteen years] can be explained as follows:

The advantage of circumcision at eight days lies in an attachment to G-d which transcends reason and understanding. Abraham circumcised himself when he was ninety-nine, after having already attained great wisdom — as indicated by his name '*Avram* — *Av Ram* (an exalted father),' i.e., the 'concealed intellect beyond any thought,' as explained in the works of the Kabbalah and Chassidut.¹² Circumcision at eight days, however, is superior; for here a child as yet devoid of intellect becomes attached to G-d in a perpetual bond which transcends reason and understanding.¹³ This is not a bond based on some perception, but is analogous to the natural, instinctive feelings a child has towards its parents, feeling itself drawn to them.

IV. Some texts question whether the *mitzvah* of circumcision is completely fulfilled at the time of actual cir-

10. *Bereishit Rabba* 43:5. Rashi on Genesis 14:17.

11. *Bereishit Rabba* 53:10

12. *Torah Or*, beginning of Lech Lecha. [See above, Lech Lecha-C, note 28*.]

13. See above, Lech Lecha-B, section IX.

cumcision, or whether it is a continuous *mitzvah* — i.e., a *mitzvah* which is continuously being fulfilled, even after the act itself." The *Gemara*¹⁴ relates that King David once entered the bath, and seeing himself naked he exclaimed: 'Woe is me that I stand naked without any *mitzvot* about me!' But as soon as he saw the circumcision in the flesh his mind was set at ease. This appears to indicate clearly that circumcision is a continuous *mitzvah*.

In terms of *avodah* this means that even in later life, after having attained reason and understanding, we are to retain the bond and covenant with G-d just as it was when first contracted by means of circumcision at the age of eight days, that is, transcending reason and knowledge.

If this bond were to derive from intellect, and be subject to intellect, it would be rather limited — whether superficial or profound, but limited in any case. Thus, even after one has reached intellectual maturity, the bond with G-d must be with *mesirat nefesh* and *kabalat ol*, i.e., transcending reason and knowledge.^f

V. When Abraham made a feast 'on the day that Isaac was weaned,' to mark Isaac's attachment to G-d — whether by means of the 'eternal covenant' (of circumcision) or because of 'this day I have begotten you,' i.e., his *bar-mitzvah* — Og, King of Bashan, ridiculed him and boasted that with his might and strength he was able to destroy everything. Abraham, however, was unimpressed by his boast. In fact, the day Isaac was weaned was celebrated with fanfare. Moreover, the downfall of Og began already then: for the mere 'speech of the Holy One,

e. [Cf. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. III, Lech Lecha, sect. II.]

14. *Menachot* 43b

f. [A covenant contingent on intellect is subject to the inevitable vagaries of the mind. The mind is neither perfect nor static; accepted concepts are challenged and rejected while new concepts are considered and adopted. When the intellect is challenged, then so is the covenant based on it. The commitment to G-d demands the unshakable foundation of absolute submission, transcending the intellect's limitations.]

blessed be He, is equivalent to an action,¹⁵ and Og was told that day that he would fall through the descendants of Isaac.

VI. All this is implied in our original verse. The fact that 'Abraham begat Isaac' made it possible for 'progeny of Isaac' to come about, for: (a) Abraham begat Isaac, and (b) he enabled Isaac to have offspring.

Of Abraham it is said, 'Abraham was one,'¹⁶ that is, he was the only Jew in all the world: 'The whole world was on one side, while he was on the other side.'¹⁷ Even so he assumed the mission to proclaim G-d's Name everywhere: 'And he invoked the Name of the Eternal, *E-l Olam* (the Everlasting G-d).'¹⁸ He did not say *E-l HaOlam* (G-d of the Universe), which would imply that G-d and the Universe are two separate entities with G-d merely the sovereign of the universe. Abraham proclaimed that the universe *per se* 'exists only through His true existence';¹⁹ it is not something apart from Divinity, as 'there is nought but He alone.'²⁰

Abraham transmitted and bequeathed this way of life to his son Isaac. Thus he made it possible that there be 'progeny of Isaac' in the sense of Torah, *mitzvot* and good deeds, as well as progeny in the literal sense — with

15. *Bereishit Rabba* 44:22.

16. Ezekiel 33:24

17. *Bereishit Rabba* 42:8.

18. Genesis 21:33

19. [Maimonides, *Hilchot Yessodei Hatorah* I:1.] *Likutei Torah*, Tavo, p.43c; end of *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* 5673; *Bati Legani* 5711, sect. 8.

g. [See Deuteronomy 4:35, and *ibid.*, verse 39, as interpreted in *Tanya-II* (*Sha'ar Hayichud Veha'emunah*), esp. ch. 1-3 and 6. Thus *E-l Olam*, in this context, becomes an equation of 'G-d (is) the universe,' in the sense that the universe is not outside or independent of G-d, or as the *Midrash* (*Bereishit Rabba* 68:9) states: G-d is the place of the world, but the world is not His place (i.e., the world is contained in G-d, though G-d transcends the world).]

descendants, existing and standing firm forever, into whose hand Og would ultimately fall.

VII. All this is relevant to every Jew:

When a Jew considers his situation, he will see himself living in a world harsh and evil where the wicked prevail.²⁰ He encounters many and varied obstructions and interferences. He notes that the greater part of his time is taken up by mundane involvements which stand in powerful opposition to the ideals of holiness. That opposition to holiness is like — and even stronger than — the might of Og against a child of eight days. This applies not only to the individual but also to the Jewish people as a whole, of whom it is said, 'You are the fewest of all the nations.'²¹

Moreover, when he does engage in holy activities, especially when he makes a great feast so that 'All the nations of the earth shall see that the Name of the Eternal is called upon you,'²² there are cynics who sneer that he is doomed to be crushed and eradicated.

All this may cause him to wonder: 'How can I possibly be able to carry out Torah, *mitzvot* and good deeds?' There is no evading this duty; for it is demanded of him not only at *ne'ilah* on *Yom Kippur*, but all the time. How, indeed, can he overcome all those disturbing obstacles?

To this effect he is given the following instruction: the experiences of the fathers are a sign for, and confer an ability to, their descendants.²³ 'Abraham begat Isaac'; you, too, are a descendant of Abraham — the father of *all* Jews, who was not impressed by all the world and proclaimed loudly: '*E-l Olam*, the world is Divine, there is nought but He!' That is how he begat Isaac in both of the senses mentioned above [section I].

20. *Tanya*, chapter 6.

21. Deuteronomy 7:7

22. Deuteronomy 28:10

23. See above, Chaye Sarah-B, section VII, footnote 17.

No Jew, anywhere or at any time, has anything to fear from those who think in terms of their might and the strength of their hands. He is attached to G-d in a way which transcends reason and understanding, and he relates that attachment to his everyday existence and activities. By doing so he transforms the physical to become tools for the Divine^h — thus the spiritual progeny of Isaac. This itself will result also in a literal progeny of Isaac — i.e., actual offspring who will vanquish all those who, like Og, battle G-d and His Torah. This, in turn, is the groundlaying and preparation for the conquest of the Land of Israel, the Holy Land, through our righteous Messiah, speedily in our own days, amen.

(From the Sicha of Shabbat Parshat Chaye Sarah 5719)

^h. [Relating the consciousness of the Divine to the mundane situation, by relating all mundane involvements to a man's Divine mission in terms of Torah and *mitzvot* — (in the sense of 'In all your ways acknowledge Him' (Proverbs 3:6; see *Berachot* 63a) and 'Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven' (*Avot* II:12; see *Tur-Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayim, sect. 231) — this transforms the physical existence and aspects into tools for Torah and *mitzvot*, and in effect sublimates them to become holy themselves. Cf. above, Chaye Sarah-D section XVI.]

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The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The essential point in the life of every Jew and that of the Jewish people as a whole throughout all the generations has been: "**All the days of your life to bring about the days of Moshiach.**"¹ This requires extra emphasis in this generation and in our times, as mentioned frequently of late, that all aspects have been completed and we need only **greet** our righteous Moshiach in actuality.

..."All the days of your life" means every moment of a person's life, day or night, awake or asleep, for he is still alive then through his breathing ("All that breathes praises G-d," and "with each and every breath a person breathes..."²), which is necessary every moment (unlike eating and drinking). And "all the days of your life to bring about the days of Moshiach" means that his life (every instant of it) is bringing the days of Moshiach. That is, a Jew does not limit himself only to those times when he thinks or speaks or does something to bring Moshiach. Rather the essence of his life ("your life") is to bring the days of Moshiach.

...In more detail:

The concept of "All the days of your life to bring about the days of Moshiach" expresses that immediately when the essence of the soul awakens (thus revealing the essence, and only the essence, of its existence), it feels in the very air it **breathes** the concept of Moshiach, **the air of Moshiach**, or in the words of our Sages of blessed memory, "**the spirit** of King Moshiach."³

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1. *Brochos* 12, end of second side - in the Mishneh.
 2. *Tehillim* at the end. *Bereishis Rabba* chapter 14:9. *Devarim Rabba* chapter 2:37.
 3. *Bereishis Rabba* chapter 2:4. Chapter 8:1.

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It can be suggested that the "air (spirit) of Moshiach" is even higher than "the light⁴ of Moshiach," because **the light** of Moshiach indicates **the revelation** of Moshiach through **his actions** (such as "he will fight the wars of G-d" until "he is victorious,"⁵ etc.). However **the air** of Moshiach indicates the essence (the very life) of Moshiach. That is, [this refers to] the revelation of **his existence** (from his earlier status as a leader⁶) as the King Moshiach. And after the revelation of **his existence** (air that is incomparable to the light of Moshiach) begins the revelation that all can see through **his activity** (light of Moshiach).

Accordingly, it can be understood that the main innovation in the coming of Moshiach is the revelation of **his existence** ("**I found Dovid my servant**"⁷), because all the details that follow (his public revelation through his activities to redeem Israel, and everything concerned with the days of Moshiach) come **as a consequence** of the revelation of his existence, **and are included in it**.

...In terms of the practical relevance - "Action is the main thing"⁸ - is that every Jew needs to increase with additional strength and vigor the concept that "all the days of your life to bring about the days of Moshiach." His entire existence, immediately upon awakening from his sleep, is penetrated with the life of Moshiach (for this is the essence of the existence of every Jew, the Moshiach within him).

4. *Zohar* section 3 34:b. Explained in *Likkutei Levi Yitzchak* on the *Zohar*, section 3, p. 219 ff.

5. *Rambam, Hilchos Melachim*, end of chapter 11.

6. "From those that come from the descendants of Dovid and still have rulership in exile... for example Rabbeinu HaKodesh" (*Chiddushei Aggados of the Maharsha to Sanhedrin 98:b*).

7. *Tehillim* 89:21. [*The Hebrew word for existence - metziyus - and that for found - matzah - have the same three letter root (Mem, Tzadik, Aleph) and are thus etymologically related. Translator's note.*]

8. *Avos*, chapter 1, *Mishneh* 17.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REDEMPTION

...And may it be G-d's Will and this is main thing - that at the beginning of the month of Kislev, the month of Redemption, there should come in reality and visibly the true and complete Redemption, the beginning of Redemption and its completion, through our righteous Moshiach. "A king from the house of Dovid will arise..." until "He will perfect the world to serve G-d in unity, as it says⁹ 'then I will turn to the nations, etc., to serve Him together.'"¹⁰

This is also alluded to in the conclusion of the Haftarah of the past week... the Haftarah of the past week concluded with the pronouncement, "**Let my lord King Dovid live forever.**"¹¹ This refers to the eternality of the kingship of Dovid that was continued through the kingship of Shlomo and which will be completed by the king Moshiach who is "from the House of Dovid and the seed of Shlomo."¹² - The content of that declaration is the revelation of **the existence** of the king Moshiach.

And through this and after this comes his revelation to the eyes of everyone through his activities, etc.

(From the talk of Wednesday night, Parshas Toldos, First Day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev, and Shabbos Parshas Toldos, 2 Kislev 5752)

9. Zephaniah 3:9.

10. Rambam, Hilchos Melachim, end of chapter 11.

11. Melachim Aleph (I Kings) 1:31.

12. *Sefer HaMitzvos* of the Rambam, negative commandment 362. Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishneh Sanhedrin*, beginning of Perek Chelek, principle 12. Iggeres Teiman.

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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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