

Parshas Toldos - Gershon Hepner

כ"ט חשוון תשע"ה – 21st November 2014 – שבת פ' תולדות

"Yitzchok had grown old, and his eyesight was fading" (27:1) – [translation from *The Living Torah*]

This possuk is the preamble to the incident of Yaakov receiving the brochos that Yitzchok intended for Eisov.

Why did Yitzchok's eyesight fail? A number of explanations are presented:

Gemorah Megilla (28a): Yitzchok had looked into the face of Eisov. The Gemorah explains that one should not look at the face of Rosho, and doing so weakened Yitzchok's eyes.

Gemorah Megilla (28a): When Avimelech abducted Soroh, he was angered that Avrohom had not told him the truth about Soroh being his wife. He cursed Soroh that her son should be blind, and so Yitzchok became blind at the age of 123.

Tagum Yonoson: At the time of the Akeidah, when he was tied up, Yitzchok saw a vision of Hashem's Divine throne. When mere flesh and blood experience such a profound Divine revelation, their eyes are inevitably weakened.

Riva [from Pesikta]: During the Akeidah, Yitzchok looked up, saw the seven Heavens parted, and saw a vision of HaShem. The possuk tells, "No man shall see Me and live" [Shemos (33:20)]. Rather than causing Yitzchok to die HaShem chose to blind him, as a blind man is considered as though he were dead [Nedorim (64b)].

Rashi #1 [from Medrash Tanchuma (paragraph 8)]: He was affected by the smoke of the idolatrous sacrifices offered up by the evil wives of Eisov.

Explanation #1: The smoke damaged his eyes.

Explanation #2: HaShem weakened Yitzchok's vision so that he would not see and be distressed by the activities of his daughters in law.

Question: If Yitzchok's eyes were affected by the smoke, why was Rivka not similarly affected?

Sifsei Chachomim: Rivka grew up with idolatrous practices all around her. She was thus used to it and immune from any suffering.

Medrash Tanchuma (paragraph 8): Yitzchok being a man, carried the characteristics of Odom Horishon who was created from earth. Rivka being a woman, carried the characteristics of Chavo who was created from bone. Bone is more resilient than earth, so Yitzchok suffered from the smoke damage, while Rivka did not.

Rashi #2: At the time of the Akeidah, angels cried over the thought that Yitzchok's life was to be sacrificed. These tears fell into Yitzchok's eyes, and weakened them as he aged.

Rashi #3: To engineer circumstances so that Yaakov should receive the brochos. Yitzchok's weakened eyesight meant he could not easily discern between Yaakov and Eisov, and he ended up blessing Yaakov rather than Eisov.

Baal HaTurim [from Bereishis Rabbo (65:6) and Medrash Tanchuma (paragraph 8)]: Yitzchok loved Eisov for supplying him with hunted game. This was tantamount to acceptance of a bribe from Eisov, and the Torah teaches us that bribery causes blindness [Devorim (16:19)]

Rabbeinu Bachye [from Bereishis Rabbo (65:5)]: HaShem did not want people in the locality pointing out Yitzchok out as the father of Eisov HoRosho. Consequently, Hashem weakened Yitzchok's eyes to curb Yitzchok's opportunities to be out and about.

Seferno: Yitzchok's weakened eyesight was a punishment for his not having rebuked Eisov for his evil ways. Eli the Kohen Godol was similarly punished for failing to discipline his children [Shmuel I (3:13) and (4:15)].

Rashbam: His old age and advancing years caused Yitzchok to suffer from weakened eyesight. Simple pshat!