

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter III: Lech Lecha (Gen. 12:1–17:27)

Essay 29. A numerical analysis of the letters of the name “Isaac”

מדרש יצחק הי"ד על שם הי' נסיונות, ה'צ' פנגד צ' שנים של שרה, ה'ח' פנגד ימי המילה, ה'ק' פנגד ק' שנה של אברהם עכ"ל. קשה למה הקדים שנות שרה לשנות אברהם, ועוד למה הקדים המילה שהיא אחר ח' ימים ללידתו.

There is a midrash that for the name Isaac [יצחק], the *yud*¹ represents the ten trials that Abraham underwent,² the *tzadi* represents the ninety years of age of Sarah when Isaac was born,³ the *chet* represents the eight days of circumcision,⁴ and the *kuf* represents the one hundred years of age of Abraham when Isaac was born.⁵ (Midrash Num. Rabbah 18:21). A difficulty is why do the years of age of Sarah, represented by the *tzadi*, precede the years of age of Abraham, represented by the *kuf*? Also, why does the circumcision, represented by the *chet*, precede the age of Abraham, represented by the *kuf*, as [the circumcision occurs] eight days following birth?

ונש לומר שאמרו ז"ל איש מזריע תחלה יולדת נקבה, אשה מזרעת תחלה יולדת זכר. לפיכך, הקדים שנות שרה לשנות אברהם לפי שנה ה'ה' זכר. והקדים הי"ד לפי שהי"ד נסיונות התחילו קודם שישא אברהם את שרי, דהיינו באור פשדים, והקדים ה'ח' פנגד ימי מילה, שבגלל המילה, זכה לבן. ועיין עוד לקמן בסמוך.

It can be said that [Rav Yitzchak, of the school of Ravi Ami], of blessed memory, said, “[If a] man emits seed first, [his wife] gives birth to a female; [if a] woman emits seed first, she gives birth to a male” (Berachot 60a). Therefore, the years of Sarah precede the years of Abraham, as this one to whom she gave birth was a male. The *yud* came first because the ten trials began before Avram married Sarai, which was in Ur Kasdim. The *chet*, representing circumcision on the eighth day after birth, preceded the *kuf*, for because of the circumcision of Abraham, he merited a son. See further below, in essay 30.

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¹ The Midrash interprets each of the four letters of Isaac’s name in terms of it’s Gematria value.

² Pirkei Avot 5:3, “With ten trials was Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace, tried, and he withstood them all; to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our father, may he rest in peace.” Gen. 22:1 explicitly states that the Binding of Isaac was a test. Commentators provide various lists of the other nine tests.

³ Gen. 17:17.

⁴ Gen. 17:12, 21:4.

⁵ Gen. 21:5.