

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VI: Toldot (Gen. 25:19-28:9)

Essay 7. Isaac's blindness and the timing of his blessings

שם במדרש "ויהי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק", יצחק תבע ייסוריו, אָמַר לְפָנָיו רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים אָדָם מִתְּבַלָּא יִיסוּרֵין מִדַּת הַדִּין מִתּוֹקָה כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, מִתּוֹךְ שְׁאֵתָהּ מְבִיא עָלָיו יִיסוּרֵין אִין מִדַּת הַדִּין מִתּוֹקָה כְּנֶגְדּוֹ, אָמַר לוֹ הַקַּב"ה חַיִּיד דְּבַר טוֹב תְּבַעַת וּמִמָּה אֲנִי מִתְחִיל, מִתְחַלֵּת הַסֵּפֶר נֶעַד כְּאֵן אִין כְּתוּב יִיסוּרֵין וְכִיּוֹן שְׁעָמַד יִצְחָק נָתַן לוֹ יִיסוּרֵין, "וְיִהְיֶה כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וְתִכְתְּבֶינָהּ" וְכוּ' עכ"ל.

We also find **there in the Midrash:**

Abraham demanded aging. He said before Him: "Master of the universe, a man and his son enter a place and no one knows which of them to honor. Because you adorn him with aging [and gray hair], a person knows whom to honor." The Holy One, Blessed be He said to him: "As you live, you have demanded a good thing, and it will begin with you." From the beginning of the book until that point, aging is not written. When Abraham stood, He granted him aging: "Abraham was old."¹

"And it was when Isaac became old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esau and said to him, 'My son.' He answered, 'Here I am.'"² **Isaac requested afflictions. He said before Him: "Master of the universe, when a person dies without afflictions, the attribute of judgment presses upon him. But when You bring afflictions upon him, the attribute of judgment is not pressed upon him." The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: "By your life, you have requested a good thing, and I will begin with you. From the beginning of the book until here, no afflictions are mentioned, and once Isaac arose, He gave him afflictions. "And it was when Isaac became old and his eyes were too dim to see."**

- Gen. Rabbah 65:9

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¹ Gen. 24:1.

² Gen. 27:1.

צריך עיון שְהָרִי בְּכָר נִגְזְרָה גְזִירַת גְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם וְאִין לָהּ יִיסוּרִין גְּדוֹלִים מֵהַגְּלוֹת. וְנִשׁ לֹאמֵר שְׂאִין הָכִי נִמְי שְׁעַל הַצְּבוּר הָיִו בְּאִים הַיִּסוּרִין אֲבָל לֹא עַל הַיִּחִיד, שְׁהַיִּחִיד נִדוֹן אַחַר הָרֹב, וְכֵן מִצִּינֵנוּ בְּאַנְשֵׁי סְדוֹם שְׁהַרְעִישׁ עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַהָרִים וְהִבִּיא עֲלֵיהֶם וְנוֹעוֹת כְּדִי שְׁיַעֲשׂוּ תְשׁוּבָה. וְעַדִּיין קִשָּׁה דְהָא אֲמַרִינוּ בְּפָרָק ג' דְעַרְכֵינוּ שְׁכָל הַיּוֹשֵׁב אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם בְּלֹא יִיסוּרִין קִבֵּל עוֹלָמוּ בְּחַיָּיו. וְקוֹדֵם שְׁיִצְחַק תְּבַע יִיסוּרִין שְׁמָא יִשׁ לָנוּ לֹאמֵר שְׁהָיִו אוֹכְלֵין עוֹלָמָם בְּחַיָּיהֶם, זֶה הוּא דְבָר שְׂאִין הַדְּעַת סוֹבְלָתוֹ, וְעוֹד שְׁכַמָּה צְדִיקִים הָיִו בְּעוֹלָם וְזָכוּ לַחַיִי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא כְּגוֹן חֲנוּךְ וּמְתוּשֶׁלַח וְדוּמִיָּהֶם.

This requires examination, for the decree of the exile to Egypt had already been issued, and there are no afflictions greater than exile. It may be said that indeed those afflictions would come upon the community, but not upon the individual, for the individual is judged in the context of the majority. Likewise, we find concerning the people of Sodom, that He overturned the mountains over them and brought terrors upon them so that they might repent.

This is still difficult to understand, for we say in the third chapter of tractate Arakhin (16b) that anyone who sits for forty days without afflictions has received his World-to-Come in his lifetime. Before Isaac requested afflictions, should we then say that they were consuming their World-to-Come in their lifetimes? This is something the mind cannot conceive. Moreover, there were already many righteous people in the world who merited the World-to-Come, such as Enoch, Methuselah, and the like.

וְנִשׁ לֹאמֵר שְׂאִין הָכִי נִמְי שְׁמִתְחַלָּה הָיִו זוֹכִים לְכָאן וּלְכָאן, כְּדִאֲמַרִינוּ בְּעוֹלָמָא אִטו צְדִיקוּ אִי אֲכִלִי תְרִי עוֹלָמִי מִי סְנִי לְהוּ? אֲמַנָם לֹאחַר שְׁנִיתְנָה הַתּוֹרָה גְּתַמְדִּשָּׁה הַהִלְכָה "כִּי בְּאֲשֶׁר יִסֵּר אִישׁ אֶת-בְּנוֹ" וְכוּ'. וּלְפִיכָּה נִיתְנָה הַתּוֹרָה עַל יְדֵי יִיסוּרִין לְרִמּוּז עַל זֶה, וְאֵלֹו הַיִּסוּרִין בָּאוּ מִחֲמַת תְּבִיעֵתוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק, כְּנוֹדַע דְּמִסְטָרָא דְיִצְחָק קִבְלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה מִמֶּשׁ מִצַּד הַדִּין, שְׁנִיבְרַר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים" וְכוּ', וְלָכֵן נִיתְנָה בְּאִשׁ וּבִשְׁוֹפָר שְׁהוּא אִילוֹ שֶׁל יִצְחָק.

One may say that indeed, at first they merited both this world and the next, as we say elsewhere: “Rava said: Is that to say that if the righteous enjoyed two worlds it would be awful for them?”³ However, after the Torah was given, a new law was established, that, “as a man chastises his son, the L-rd, your G-d chastises you.”⁴ Therefore, the Torah was given through afflictions to allude to this, and these afflictions came because of Isaac’s request. As it is known, it is from the side of Isaac that Israel received the Torah directly from the Almighty, from the aspect of judgment, as it is said, “And G-d spoke all these words,”⁵ and therefore it was given with fire and with the shofar, which is the ram of Isaac.⁶

³ Horayot 10b.

⁴ Deut. 8:5.

⁵ Ex. 20:1.

⁶ Rashi on Ex. 19:13.

אי נמי יש לומר שקודם יצחק לא היו ייסורין בעולם, כלומר שהעבירות של בני אדם אינם מתפפרים על ידי ייסורין של הגוף בעולם הזה, אלא היו מתמרקים בייסורי הנפש לעולם הבא, והייסורין שהיו להם בעולם הזה לא היו אלא לעורר לבם אל התשובה. ויצחק תבע שיבואו ייסורין למירווק העון כדי שלא תהא בשעת מיתה מדת הדין מתוקה פנגדו, וזהו שאמר לו, דבר טוב תבעת וממך אני מתחיל, שתתכפר בהם בעולם הזה מהחטא שחטאת, כדאיתא במדרש שעל ידי שהביט בשכינה פהו עיניו.

Alternatively, one may say that before Isaac there were no afflictions in the world, as if to say that the sins of man were not forgiven by afflictions of the body in this world. Rather, they were purified through afflictions of the soul for the World-to-Come, and the afflictions they experienced in this world were only to awaken their hearts to repentance. But Isaac requested that afflictions come to cleanse sin, so that at the time of death the attribute of judgment would not be pressed upon him. This is what [G-d] said to him: “You have requested a good thing, and from you I will begin,” meaning that you will be atoned through them in this world for the sin you committed, as it says in the Midrash, that when Abraham bound his son atop the altar, Isaac directed his eyes heavenward, and because he gazed at the Divine Presence, his eyes dimmed.⁷

ועוד יש לדקדק על הפסוקים איד תליא ידיעת המיתה בכהניית עיניו, ומה ענין זה לברכה, ומה הוא "הנהנא זקנתי" דמשמע עכשיו ולא קודם, ומהו "ועתה" וכו', דמשמע שזה דוקא גורם ליתן לו הברכה, דאם כמו שמוכן מהפשוט לא היה צריך לומר "ועתה".

Furthermore, one must examine the verses.

Question 1: How is the knowledge of approaching death dependent on the dimming of his eyes?

Question 2: What does this blindness have to do with the giving of the blessing?

Question 3: What is the significance of “He said, behold now, I am old, and I do not know how soon I may die,”⁸ which means he became old only “now” and not previously?

Question 4: Also, what is the significance of saying “And now” at the opening of the verses, “And now, take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die.”⁹ This means that this blindness specifically is what causes him to give the blessing, whereas if the verses were to be understood simply as a blessing before death, he would not need to say “and now,” which tied the blessing to the blindness.

⁷ Gen. Rabbah 65:10.

⁸ Gen. 27:2.

⁹ Gen. 27:3–4.

ויובן במאי דאמרין בי לקוט על פסוק "ואברהם זקן", אברהם תבע זקנה וכו' יצחק תבע ייסורין וכו', ובמדרש הנזכר למעלה על פסוק "ותכהין עיניו מראת", למה כהו עיניו יצחק בשביל שהתניף לעשו, בשביל שהעמיד בן רשע, בשביל שהביט בשכינה בעת העקידה, בשביל המלאכים וכו' וכמה טעמים אחרים ועיי"ש. ומעתה כד אמר יצחק בלבבו בשלמא אם הנה בא לי סמיות עינים קודם הזקנה, הנה לי להסתפק מאיזה טעם בא, ושמא בא מחמת עשו שהוה רשע ואינו מן הראוי ליתן לו הברכות מתמת ספק, אבל עתה שבאה לי זקנה קודם סמיות עינים. זה מוכח בנדאי שלא בא הסמיות עינים אלא לפי שתבעתי ייסורין, ואני תבעתי שיבואו הייסורין מעט קודם המיתה. ומשום הכי אמר הנה בא שיש לי סמיות עינים יש לי לחוש על יום המיתה שקרוב לבוא אחר הייסורין.

This can be understood in light of what is said in the Yalkut Shimoni, parashat Chayei Sarah, §105:2 on the verse “And Abraham was old”: Abraham requested old age, etc.; Isaac requested afflictions, etc. In the aforementioned Midrash on the verse “and his eyes were too dim to see,” why did Isaac’s eyes dim? Because he favored Esau;¹⁰ because he raised a wicked son;¹¹ because he gazed upon the Divine Presence at the time of the binding; because of the angels who at the time of the binding shed tears that fell into Isaac’s eyes;¹² etc., and several other reasons—see there.

Now Isaac said in his heart: “Granted, if blindness had come to me before old age, I would have had reason to doubt from which cause it came, and perhaps it came because of Esau, who is wicked, and it would not be appropriate to give him the blessings due to that uncertainty. But now that old age came to me before the blindness, this clearly indicates that the blindness came only because I requested afflictions, and I requested that the afflictions come a little before death.” Therefore, he said: “Behold now,’ since I have blindness, I must be concerned that the day of death is close, coming soon after the afflictions.”

This answers Questions 1 through 3: Because he requested that afflictions come shortly before death, he took his blindness as a sign that death was near, and thus he should not delay before extending a blessing.

אי נמי בדרה אחר דאמרין סוף פרק קמא דבתרא שלושה הטעמן הקב"ה מעין העולם הבא, אברהם יצחק ויעקב, דקתיב בהו "בפל" "מפל" "כל". ודייק העיון יעקב דדוקא טעימה בעלמא, שהרי שקרם גנוז לבסוף.

Alternatively, one may explain in another way: As we say at the end of the first chapter of tractate Bava Batra (16b), the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave three people a “taste” of the World-to-Come—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—for it is written concerning them: “And the Lord had blessed Abraham in everything [bakol] [בכל].”¹³ With regard to Isaac, the verse

¹⁰ Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeichi 6:3. This refers to the reference in Gen. 27:1 to Esau as הגדל, which could mean either “the elder” or “the greater one.”

¹¹ Gen. Rabbah 65:10: “The Holy One, Blessed be He said: ‘Isaac will walk out to the marketplace and the people will say: This is the father of that wicked one [i.e., Esau]. Instead, I will dim his eyes and he will remain inside his house.’ That is what is written: ‘With the rise of the wicked, a person should hide’ (Prov. 28:28). From here they said: Anyone who produces a wicked son or a wicked student, ultimately his eyes will dim.”

¹² Gen. Rabbah 65:10.

¹³ Gen. 24:1.

states: “And I have eaten **of everything** [*mikol*] [מכל].”¹⁴ With regard to Jacob, the verse states: “And because I have **everything** [*kol*] [כל].”¹⁵ **The *Iyun Ya’akov* was precise that this was specifically a foretaste within this world, for their full reward remained stored away for the end of their lives.**

ובנה נבאר קשר הפסוק "המאכלה מן במדבר אשר לא ידעו אבותיה למען ענתה ולמען נסתה להיטבה באחריתה", ועוד מהו "אשר לא ידעו אבותיה", דנה מילתא דפשיטא היא. והיינו שהנה ישראל אכלו את המן היורד מן השמים, והוא מאכל של עולם הבא, דשחקים שחקים מן לצדיקים לעתיד לבוא. ואמר הכתוב זה המאכל של עולם הבא, האכילה הקב"ה מה שלא עשה לאבותיה, שאף על פי שהטעמים מעין העולם הבא לא הנה אלא טעימה בעלמא, ואצלכם היתה אכילה מממש שהיא יותר מטעימה.

With this we can explain the connection of the elements of the verse, “Who feeds you in the wilderness with manna, which your ancestors had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end,”¹⁶ and furthermore, what is meant by “which your ancestors had never known,” for this seems obvious, since clearly their ancestors had never eaten manna. That is, here Israel ate the manna that descended from Heaven, and it is described as the food of the World-to-Come, as the Sages said, “the [firmament called] *Shechakim* [שחקים] grinds [*shochakim*] [שוחקים] manna for the righteous in the future to come.”¹⁷ Scripture is saying: this food of the World-to-Come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, fed you in a way He did not do for your fathers, for although He did give them a *taste* of the World-to-Come, it was only a tasting; whereas for you it was not merely tasting but *actual eating*, which is more than tasting.

ואי תימא אם פן למה הנה להם הצער שלא הנה להם פת בסלם, כדאמר רבנו בפרק ח' דיומא, ועוד שהיו טועמים הטעמים ולא היו רואים. והא העולם הבא הוא פלו מעדנים בלי צער כלל. משום הכי תירץ הכתוב שעשה זה "למען ענתה ולמען נסתה להיטבה באחריתה", שנתן להם זה הצער כדי שיוכרו באחרית הימים לעולם הבא ולא יאכלו עולמם בחייהם, וענין עוד לקמן בסמוך.

If you’ll say, if so, how did they have suffering, i.e., what affliction was there in eating the manna? The answer is that they did not have bread in their basket, as it is said in chapter 8 of tractate Yoma (74b), that as there was no leftover food, the people worried they might not have anything to eat the next day.¹⁸ Also, they were tasting the flavors but did not see anything but the plain-appearing manna. I.e., though the manna could taste like anything, it always looked like coriander seed. The enjoyment of food is based not only on taste, but also on other factors,

¹⁴ Gen. 27:33.

¹⁵ Gen. 33:11.

¹⁶ Deut. 8:16.

¹⁷ Chagigah 12b.

¹⁸ Yoma 74b, derived from Ps. 78:23–24: “And He commanded the firmament [*Shechakim*] above, and opened the doors of Heaven; and He caused manna to rain upon them for food, and gave them of the corn of Heaven.”

including appearance. Being unable to see the food that they tasted was an affliction.¹⁹ **But the World-to-Come is entirely pleasures without any suffering.**

Because of this, Scripture explained that He did this “in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end,” that He gave them this suffering in order that at the end of days, they should merit the World-to-Come, and would not eat their portion of it in their lifetime. See further below.

ומעמיה אם היה יצחק נותן הברכות לבניו בשעה שלא היה לו שום צער ואדרבא היה טועם מעין העולם הבא, היה משמע שימן להם הברכות שיזכו בעולם הזה לאכול מעין העולם הבא, וחס ושלום יאכלו עולמם בחייהם, שהרי מפת הברכה היה ניתוסף להם הרבה יותר מקדי טעימה, אי נמי שמי שיש לו מעט זכות, אף אם לא יקבל בעולם הזה אלא קדי טעימה בלבד מפת הברכה, יהיה אוכל עולמו בחייו, ולכן המתין עד שבאו עליו הייסורין ואז נתן להם הברכה, וימתו לה האלהים מטל השמים" וכו', כדי שיהיו הברכות עם ייסורין להטיב להם באחריתם.

Now, if Isaac had given the blessings to his sons at a time when he had no suffering, and to the contrary was tasting from the World-to-Come, it would have implied that he was granting them the blessings so that they would merit to eat from the World-to-Come in this world, and Heaven forbid, they would consume their portion in their lifetime. For by virtue of the blessing, much more than just a taste would be added to them.

Alternatively, one who has a little merit, if he receives only a taste by virtue of the blessing in this world, would be consuming his portion in his lifetime.

Therefore, he waited until afflictions came upon him, and then gave them the blessing: “May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, abundance of new grain and wine,”²⁰ so that the blessings would come together with afflictions, to benefit them in their end.

ובדרך זה אמר הכתוב "ויהי כייזמן יצחק ומתקין עיניו", שהזקנה לפעמים היא חולי גדול לגוף כדאמרין סיבותא פליא דחילפי, ולפעמים היא לו לכבוד גדול כדכתיב "והדרת פני זמן", ובכמה כתובים מצינו שחלק הקב"ה כבוד לזקנים.

In this way, the verse says, “And it was when Isaac became old and his eyes were too dim to see,” for old age is sometimes a great sickness to the body, as it is said, “old age is a crown of thorns,”²¹ and sometimes it is for great honor, as it is written, “Before the gray-haired you shall rise, and show deference to the old.”²² In a number of other writings, we find that the Holy One, Blessed be He, apportions honor to the elderly.²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gen. 27:28.

²¹ Shabbat 152a.

²² Lev. 19:32.

²³ Ex. Rabbah 5:14.

ובקשראָה יצחק שאַסר הזקנה באַ הסמיות עינים אַז אַמר "הנה־נא זקנתי", דבשלאַמא אַם לאַ כהו עיניו דהיינו שלאַ באו עָליו הייסורין, אַז הזקנה היְתה אַדרבא לוי לכבוד, כְּדַכְּתִיב "וַיִּגְד זִקְנֵי כְבוֹד", וְגַם זֶה הָיָה מְעִין הָעוֹלָם הַבֵּא כְּדַכְּתִיב "וְעַתִּיק יוֹמִין יִתֵּב". אַבְל עֲכָשְׁיוּ שְׁפָהוּ עֵינָיו מִצַּד הַיִּיסוּרִין, אַם כֵּן הָיָה זִקְנָה טְבֵעִית מִמֶּשׁ שֶׁהָיָה לַמִּשָּׂא עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם. וְזֶהוּ "הנה־נא זקנתי", "נא" דוקא, "וְעַתָּה שְׂא־נא" וכו', "נא" דוקא שְׁהוֹאִיל שְׁיֵשׁ לִי יִיסוּרִין אֲנִי יְכוֹל לְכַרְכְּדָּהּ.

Question 4 asked the significance of the opening words of the verse, “And now, take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game,” which tied the onset of blindness to the timing of the blessing. **When Isaac saw that after old age the dimming of the eyes had come, he said, “Behold now, I am old.” For indeed, if his eyes had not dimmed, meaning that the afflictions had not come upon him, then the old age would have been for honor, as it is written, “And glory will be for the elders,”²⁴ and this too would have been like the World-to-Come, as it is written, “and the Ancient of Days sat.”²⁵ But now that his eyes had dimmed because of afflictions, then it was actual old age, which is a burden upon men. This is the meaning of, “Behold now, I am old,” the word “now” specifically, and “And now, take your gear, your quiver and bow,” the word “now” specifically, that he meant, “since I have afflictions, I am able to bless you.”** I.e., as discussed above, if he had blessed his sons when he had no afflictions, he would have been tasting from the World-to-Come and implying that they would merit the not only a taste, but by virtue of the blessing, would have consumed their World-to-Come in this world. But once he had afflictions, he could safely bless them, as it would be understood that they wouldn’t be wasting their reward in this world.

ובדָּרָךְ זֶה יוֹבוֹ נָמִי מְדַרְשׁ תְּמוּנָה בְּיַלְקוּט תְּהִלִּים וְזֶה לְשׁוֹנוֹ, "כִּי־עַד־צָדֵק יָשׁוּב מִשְׁפָּט" מְדַבֵּר בְּיַצְחָק, עַד אוֹתוֹ צָדִיק יָשׁוּב מִשְׁפָּט, "וְנִהְי כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק" יָשׁוּב מִשְׁפָּט, "וְאֶחָרָיו כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל־לֵב" שְׂאֵלוֹ לְשִׁמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן מֵהוּ "וְאֶחָרָיו כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל־לֵב", אָמַר לָהֶם מִתּוֹ שֶׁכָּרוּ שָׁל צְדִיקִים לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם וְשָׁל רְשָׁעִים לְפָנֵיהֶם עַכ"ל.

In this way, a difficult Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim can also be understood, and this is its language:

“For to righteousness, judgment will return, and after it all the upright of heart.”²⁶ This is speaking of Isaac: to that righteous man, judgment will return, “and it was when Isaac became old” that judgment will return, “and after it all the upright of heart.”

They asked the young Samuel what was the meaning of “and after it all the upright of heart.” He said to them, “The reward of the righteous comes after them, and the punishment of the wicked comes before them.”

- Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, remez 850:3

²⁴ Isaiah 24:23.

²⁵ Dan. 7:9.

²⁶ Ps. 94:15.

וְקוֹשֶׁה מִה עֲנִינוּ יִצְחָק לְכָאוּ. אֲכַל לְפִי שְׂמֵי צִחָק תִּבְעַע יִיסוּרִין, אֲתִי שְׁפִיר, עַד אוֹתוֹ צְדִיק יָשׁוּב מִשְׁפֹּט, שְׂבִי צִחָק הַתְּחִיל הַמִּשְׁפֹּט שֶׁל עוֹלָם הֵבֵא לְהַתְּהַפֵּךְ לְיִיסוּרִין בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שְׁנֵאמַר "וְנִהְיֵי כִּי-יִצְחָק יִצְחָק" וְכוּ'. וּמֵהוּ זֶה שְׁסֵיִים "וְאַחֲרָיו כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל-לֵב", שְׁנֵרָאָה שְׂאֲחֵר יִצְחָק כָּל הַצְּדִיקִים דְּנֻקָּא יִלְקוּ בְּיִיסוּרִין וְלֹא הֶרְשָׁעִים, וְשׁוֹרֵת הַדִּין לֹא כֹּה הִיא אֲלֵא שְׁהֶרְשָׁעִים יִלְקוּ בְּיִיסוּרִין. וּמִשׁוֹם הַכִּי שְׂאֵלוֹ מֵהוּ "וְאַחֲרָיו כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל-לֵב", וְהַשִּׁיב לָהֶם, מִתּוֹן שְׂכָרוֹ שֶׁל צְדִיקִים לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם וְשֶׁל רְשָׁעִים לְפָנֵיהֶם דְּנֻקָּא כְּדִכְתִּיב "וּמִשְׁלֵם לְשִׁנְאָיו אֶל-פָּנָיו" וְכוּ'.

This is difficult, for what is the relevance of Isaac here? But according to the fact that Isaac demanded afflictions, it is clear: to that righteous man, judgment will return. With Isaac, the judgment of the World-to-Come began to be transformed into afflictions in this world, as it is said, “and it was when Isaac became old,” etc. What is meant by the conclusion, “and after it all the upright of heart”? It appears that after Isaac, all the righteous specifically would experience afflictions, and not the wicked. But the pattern of justice is not like this; rather, the wicked receive afflictions. Therefore, they asked, what was the meaning of “and after it all the upright of heart,” and [Samuel] answered them, “the reward of the righteous comes after them, and the punishment of the wicked comes before them,” specifically, as it is written, “But those who hate Him, He will repay to their face by destruction.”²⁷

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לוֹמַר בְּקוֹשֶׁר הַפְּסוּקִים הַנִּזְכָּר לְעֵיל "הַמְּאֲכִלָה מִן בְּמִדְבָּר", דְּקוֹשֶׁה נְמִי מֵלֵת "בְּמִדְבָּר" וְכִי עֲדִיין אִין אֲנוּ יוֹדְעִים שְׂאֲכִלוּהוּ בְּמִדְבָּר. וְיֵשׁ לוֹמַר שְׂכָבֵר יְדוּעַ שְׂכָל הָאִיסוּרִין הוֹתֵרוּ בְּמִקוֹם סַכְנָה, וְהָמֵן שְׁהוּא מְאָכֵל קִדְשׁ הוֹתֵר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבָּר מִשׁוֹם פִּיקוּם נִפְשׁ, שְׂשֵׁם לֹא הָיָה לָהֶם מְאָכֵל אַחֵר כְּדִאֲמַרְיָן לֹא הַפִּילָה אִשָּׁה מְרִיִם בְּשֵׁר הַקִּדְשׁ, שְׂאֵם הָיְתָה מִתְּאַנָּה הָיָה צְרִיף לִיתֵן לָהּ, אֲכַל לְאַבּוֹת שְׁהָיוּ בְּמִקוֹם יִישׁוּב לֹא הוֹתֵר לָהֶם לְאַכּוֹל מְאָכֵל קִדְשׁ, רַק הִטְעִימָן מֵעֵין הָעוֹלָם הֵבֵא, טְעִימָה בְּלִבָּד, וְזֵהוּ מֵה שְׂאֵמֵר הַפְּתוּב, "הַמְּאֲכִלָה מִן", לְפִי שְׁהָיְתָם בְּמִדְבָּר הוֹתֵר לָכֶם מֵה שְׂאִין כּוֹן לְאַבּוֹתֵיכֶם, וְזֵהוּ "אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִדְעוּן אֲבֹתֵיךְ".

It can also be said regarding the above verses, “Who feeds you in the wilderness with manna,” that the word “in the wilderness” is also difficult, for don’t we already know that they ate it in the wilderness. I.e., it seems superfluous to add that word. One can say that it is already known that all prohibitions are permitted in a place of danger, and the manna, which is a sacred food, was permitted to Israel in the wilderness so as to preserve life, since there was no other food available to them, as it is stated, “no woman miscarried from the odor of the sacred flesh;”²⁸ if she desired it, it had to be given to her.²⁹ But for the Patriarchs, who were in a settled place, it was not permitted for them to eat sacred food; they only tasted a sample of the World-to-Come, merely a taste. This is what the verse says, “Who feeds you with manna,” for since you were in the wilderness, it was permitted to you in a way that was not permitted to your fathers, and this is what is meant by “which your ancestors had never known.”

²⁷ Deut. 7:10.

²⁸ Pirkei Avot 5:5; Yoma 21a.

²⁹ Yoma 82a; Tosafot Yom Tov.

וְאִם תֹּאמַר לָמָּה נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַמָּן בְּעֵינֵינוּ וּרְעֵבוֹן וּבִצְעָר כְּגִזְכָּר לְעֵיל, וּכְמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ ו"ל עַל "וַיִּעַנְדָּהּ בַּיָּרְעֵבָהּ", הֲלֹא טוֹבַת הָעוֹלָם הִבָּא הִיא טוֹבָה מְלִיאָה וּשְׁלִימָה וְלֹא טוֹבָה חֲסֵרָה. וְתִירֵץ לְהַטִּיבָהּ בְּאַחֲרֵיתָהּ, דְּהֵינּוּ שְׁלֵא יֵאָכְלוּ עוֹלָמָם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם, שֶׁאֵף עַל פִּי שְׁהוּמָר לָהֶם לְאֹכֹל מִשּׁוּם פִּיקוּס נְפֶשׁ, לֹא הוּתְרָה לָהֶם הַהֲנָאָה הַיְתִירָה.

Perhaps you will say, why did He give us the manna with hardship, hunger, and distress, as mentioned above, and as our Sages said regarding “He will afflict you and make you hungry”³⁰? Is not the goodness of the World-to-Come full and complete, not deficient? [The verse] answered: in order to do good for you in your end, meaning, that they should not consume their portion in the World-to-Come in their lifetimes; for although it was permitted for them to eat because of danger to life, the extra enjoyment was not permitted to them.

* * *

³⁰ Deut. 8:3.