



# עינייִם לתורה

Published by the Student Organization of Yeshiva

## The Price of Greatness

by Rabbi Norman Lamm



יְהִי כִּי זֶמֶן יִצְחָק וְתִקְהֶינּוּ עֵינֵינוּ מֵרָא'ת

In a cryptic comment, the Hasidic Rebbe R. Mordechai Yosef, "The Izhbitzer," notes (in his *mei shiloach*) that Isaac was forbidden to leave Eretz Israel, but was blind, whereas Moses was forbidden to enter the Holy Land but retained his clarity of sight to the very end (*lo kahata eino*). It is a trenchant observation, but one wonders: What is its significance?

In order to understand this fascinating contrast, let us first explore the afflictions to which our most distinguished ancestors were heir. The Fathers of Israel all experienced the gift of prophecy—and all were left with some noticeable defect, some *mum*. Thus: Isaac was blind according to the Midrash (see Rashi to 27:1) because of the tears of the angels who wept at his imminent immolation on the *Akedah*. Jacob limped (*tzoleah al yereicho*) as a result of his striving with an unknown assailant. Thus, Isaac and Jacob were physically injured after their encounters with God.

With Abraham, we find no physical ailment as a concomitant of prophecy, but we do find indirect indications of an emotional trauma—which can be far worse than a physical ailment. Note that when the Almighty summons Abraham to the *Akedah*, He commands him to offer up his son Isaac, who is described as "*et bincha at yechidcha asher ahavta et Yitzchak*". After the angel halts the slaughtering of Isaac, we read the encomium bestowed on Abraham: "*ki atah yadati ki yerei Elokim atah v'lo chasachta et bincha et yechidcha mimeni*". Here we find mention of Isaac as Abraham's son, and his *only son*—only two of the three adjectives used in the command to offer up Isaac. Why no mention of Isaac as Abraham's beloved son?

I suggest that Abraham, as a result of his incredible religious experience of the nearly accomplished *Akedah*, suffered an emotional shock, such that it was no longer possible to bestow the encomium of *asher ahavta* upon Isaac. It is not that Abraham no longer loved him; indeed, it would be natural for him to love him even more. But the whole point of the *Akedah* was for Abraham to subordinate his natural love for his son to his higher love for the *Ribbono Shel Olam* so that, *relatively speaking*, his love for Isaac suffered a diminution. This was the defect visited upon him as a result of his prophetic *Akedah* experience.

The necessity to suffer, either physically or emotionally, as a consequence of *gilui shechina*, is evident in the divine address to Moses after the Golden Calf incident: *lo tuchal lir'ot et panai, ki lo yirani ha'adam vachai*. In the

Continued on next page

### זמנים

Candle lighting.....	4:19pm
Alot HaShachar.....	5:20am
Sunrise.....	6:45am
Shema (מג"א).....	8:37am
Shema (גר"א).....	9:13am
Sof Zeman Teffillah.....	10:02am
Chatzot.....	11:41am
Mincha Gedolah.....	12:05pm
Sunset.....	4:36pm
Havdalah.....	5:20pm

Times are for New York City

Continued from previous page

encounter with the divine, one's very existence becomes precarious, it is dangerous to one's health, for it is utterly unlike any other human experience. Neither man's body nor his mind—nor his soul—can survive the encounter with the Absolute without any permanent change or scar.

The lesson seems to be that greatness, not only prophecy, is acquired at the expense of some blemish. In the spiritual world, no less than in the commercial one, the rule of "no pain, no gain" holds fast.

Is this phenomenon applicable to our ordinary, quotidian, contemporary life? I believe it is. The study of Torah, the Sages taught (*Sanh.* 26b), weakens a man and saps his strength. Similarly, they said that *minayin she'ain divrei torah mitkaymin elah b'mi shemaymit atzmo aleha - shene'emar 'zot hatorah adam ki yamut ba'ohel*. (*Ber.* 63b; and see Torah Temimah to Bamidbar 19:14 that this refers not literally to death, but to weakness.) And Torah, after all, is prophecy, for in its totality it is *nevuat Moshe Rabbeinu*. This is something all of us ought to keep in mind—*l'fum tza'ara agraph*.

When I was a youngster I heard what was probably the last public *sheur* of R. Shlomo Hyman zt"l in which he bemoaned the fact that there are those who want to become *talmidei chachamim* overnight-- without losing a night's sleep...

Perhaps we are now able to unravel the meaning behind the Izhbitzer's contrast of Moses and Isaac. Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land specifically because he was *not* blind and suffered no defect as the result of his preeminent prophecy (his speech impediment presumably preceded his prophetic experience). As the *adon haneviim*, he was uniquely immune to such untoward consequences. Not only was his sight not affected, but his vision was so powerful, so penetrating and enduring, that it was devastating to others. Moses could see through all falsehood, all pretence. He could not and would not compromise his absolute quest for sanctity by catering to the moral flabbiness and spiritual weaknesses of even his best contemporaries. His vision rendered him intolerant of failures, and this disposition did not bode well for him as the leader of the People of Israel when they settled Canaan and began a "normal" career as a nation.

With great effort, Truth and Peace can live together—*emet umishpat shalom shiftu b'shaareichem* (Zechariah 8:16)—but *absolute* truth, the kind associated with

Moses in his undying vision, cannot successfully coexist with the human failings of a society of non-prophets. Certainly, leadership requires vision and high principle, but not the absolute insistence upon the truth and rightness of your own position.

One thinks of R. Shimon bar Yochai and his son R. Elazar who emerged from their cave after thirteen years in a state of exquisite spirituality, such that whatever they looked at was immediately incinerated (*Shabbat* 33b). In both cases—that of Moses and that of the two Tannaim—an extremely high degree of spiritual excellence rendered them incapable of living in a "normal" society. Thus, Moses had to pitch his tent outside the Camp, and the two Tannaim were ordered back into their cave until they could tolerate the modest spiritual ambitions of ordinary good Jews.

In the desert, Moses could manage to lead his people from outside the Camp; in the Land of Israel, his acute, superhuman spiritual vision would have made the regular commerce of collective life impossible for ordinary Jews with their wide and annoying range of opinions and dispositions. By contrast, Isaac, who had no or impaired sight/vision, was able to survive in the Holy Land and never leave it.

## Who Gets The Blame — Taking Responsibility for One's Actions

by Reuven Brand

At the close of this week's *parsha*, the Torah describes Esav's reaction to the surprising turn of events in which he lost the *berachot* of his aging father Yitzchak. The Torah records that Esav went to find a wife among the daughters of Yishmael, his uncle. The Sochatchover Rebbe explains Esav's actions in his *sefer*, *Shem MiShemuel*.

One could have understood that after such a devastating loss, Esav would have looked to change his sinful behavior. The Torah teaches us that Esav did exactly the opposite and instead of blaming his demise on his own spiritual shortcomings, he placed the blame on his wives. He claimed that the loss of the *berachot* was their fault, because their lineage was not worthy of Yitzchak's blessing, and therefore, he went to the house of Yishmael, Avraham's son, in search of additional wives.

This unwillingness to take responsibility was characteris-