

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 15

Toldos, Sicha 4

The Verse:

Yitzchak decided the time had come for him to bless his sons. As he explained to Eisav, “Behold now, I have grown old; I do not know the day of my death.” (Bereishis 27:2)

The Rashi:

I do not know the day of my death — Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah said: If a person reaches the age of his parent’s passing, he should worry five years beforehand and five years afterwards. Yitzchak was one hundred and twenty-three years old. He said, “Perhaps I will reach the age of my mother, and she died at one hundred and twenty-seven, and I am thus within five years of her age; therefore, ‘I do not know the day of my death,’ — perhaps [I will reach] my mother’s age and perhaps my father’s age.”

The Questions:

1. Why does Rashi need to offer an elaborate explanation as to why Yitzchak was concerned about his impending passing? The verse itself records Yitzchak’s concern — “behold I have grown old”!
2. What nuance is added by citing the author of this teaching, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha?

The Explanation:

Earlier, we read how after Avraham’s passing, “G-d blessed his son Yitzchak (Bereishis 26:11). Presumably, this blessing from G-d Himself included a blessing for unnaturally long life. If so, how could Yitzchak be concerned about his mortality simply from having “grown old,” when he had G-d’s blessing?

Rashi therefore clarifies that Yitzchak was not concerned by general old age, but by the specific age that he had reached. Once he was within five years of his mother’s passing, he began thinking about his impending passing.

But this is still unsatisfactory because the concern a person has when they reach the age of their parent's passing is that they have come close to the end of the natural lifespan, inherited genetically from their parents. Yitzchak, then, should not have begun to worry once he reached the ballpark of his natural lifespan, for he was blessed with an unnaturally long life!

The explanation is that Avraham and Sarah did not pass away at their naturally appointed time. When Avraham was 100 and Sara was 90, G-d blessed them as well. Avraham went on to live another 75 years, and Sarah lived another 37 years (she passed away at the age of 127). It follows that Sarah's natural lifespan was to be 90 years, but through G-d's blessing, she was granted another 37 years. The window for Yitzchak's concern about his natural mortality would be five years prior to his mother's passing, at age 85. With G-d's blessing, however, he could safely assume that he would be granted at least 37 years of additional life, similar to the additional years granted to his mother. Thus, once he reached his 123rd year, he began to worry about his mortality, for he had lived out both the minimum number of years he would naturally be expected to live (85), and the number of years granted miraculously (37).

In reality, he lived to 180, which reflected the natural lifespan (105 being the maximum natural lifespan, five years more than Avraham's natural lifespan) and the addition of the miraculous lifespan (75 additional years) of his father.

But the astute student will recall that Rashi previously said that Avraham passed away five years before his time in order so that he would not see Eisav, his grandson, embark on an evil path. (Rashi on Bereishis 15:15) As such, Yitzchak should have lived another five years, consistent with Avraham's true lifespan.

To address this, Rashi cites the author of the teaching, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah, who attributed his own long life to "never peering at the face of a wicked person." (Megillah 27b) This implies that looking at the face of an evil person can reduce a person's life expectancy. It follows that Yitzchak, who did see Eisav, had some of his allotted years withdrawn.

The Inner Dimension:

When assessing his own life expectancy, Yitzchak was concerned that he would pass away at the earliest possible age — five years before his mother, who passed away at a younger age than his father. This aligns with Yitzchak's general disposition and spiritual identity of severity and judgment.

But when it came to blessing his children, he promised them the "dew of heaven and the fat of the earth," withholding nothing from his blessing.

So, too, if we are stern judges of our own behavior, we must ensure that we are still generous and non-judgmental when dealing with others.
