

"Dehr Tateh's Yahren¹" (Father's Years)

Our Parsha has in it the sum total of the years of life of three people, and Rashi's comments therein:

- (i) Sarah: (-Genesis 23:1), "And the life of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sarah." Rashi, "The reason that the word 'years' was written after every digit is to tell you that every digit is to be expounded upon individually: when she was one hundred years old, she was like a twenty-year-old regarding sin. Just as a twenty-year-old has not sinned, because she is not liable to punishment, so too when she was one hundred years old, she was without sin. And when she was twenty, she was like a seven-year-old as regards to beauty."
- (ii) Abraham: (-ibid 25:7), "And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life that he lived: one hundred years and seventy years and five years." Rashi: "When he was one hundred years old, he was as one who is seventy years old, and when he was seventy years old, he was as one who is five years old, without sin."
- (iii) (-ibid 25:17), "And these are the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred years and thirty years and seven years." Rashi, "Why were Ishmael's years counted? In order to trace through them the years of Jacob. (From the years of Ishmael we learn that Jacob studied in the academy of Eber for fourteen years after he left his father before arriving to Laban, for when Jacob left his father, Ishmael died)."

Differences: (i) By Sarah, Rashi states, "expounded upon individually," by Abraham, Rashi just teaches directly what is expounded, and by Ishmael, Rashi makes no mention at all to the verses', "the word 'years' was written after every digit." (ii) By Sarah, where, "expounded upon individually," we learn out two characteristics: Sinless (at 100 as at 20), and Beauty (at 20 as at 7), while by Abraham we learn but of one characteristic: Sinless (at 100 as at 70, and at 70 as at 5). Why?

Explanation: Rashi's stating a rule by Sarah (the first time that), "The reason that the word 'years' was written after every digit is to tell you that every digit is to be expounded upon individually," already tells us that it is so by Abraham, as well, and that the characteristic taught from, "at 100 as at 70," is not the same as that of, "at 70 as at 5" (sinless). And the only reason why Rashi doesn't explicitly state the second characteristic of Abraham from, "at 100 as at 70," is because the verse itself states it (-ibid 17:17): "Will [a child] be born to one who is a hundred years old," upon which Rashi comments, "In Abraham's time, the years were already lessened, and weakness had come to the world... hastened to beget children at the age of sixty and seventy." Thus, the second characteristic of Abraham is clear, that while all others lost their virility at 70, Abraham was, "at 100² as at 70," having begot Ishmael at the age of 86. Hence, Abraham's virility simply extended to 100, when he begets Isaac, and even years later, when he begot another 6 sons with his second wife, Keturah.

With this we understand yet another difference in Rashi's commentary. The verse tells us (-ibid 21:7), "And she (Sarah) said, 'Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children (plural), for I have borne a son to his old age!'" Rashi explains: "Why is 'children' in the plural? On the day of the feast, the princesses brought their children with them, and she nursed them, for they were saying, 'Sarah did not give birth, but brought in a foundling from the street.'" Another verses (-ibid 25:19) tells us, "And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham begot Isaac." Rashi explains: "Since Scripture wrote, 'Isaac the son of Abraham,' it had to say, 'Abraham begot Isaac,' because the scorners of the generation were saying that Sarah had conceived from Abimelech, for she had lived with Abraham for many years and had not conceived from him. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He shaped the features of Isaac's face to resemble Abraham's, and everyone attested that Abraham had begotten Isaac." Why by Sarah does Rashi say that it was the 'princesses', while by Abraham it was only the 'scorners of the generation'? Especially since Sarah's nursing the children said nothing of to the princesses of Abraham's fathering Isaac? This question on Rashi takes on an ever greater dimension, being that the Talmud (-Baba Metzia 87a) tells the story: "All of the nations of the world were gossiping and saying, 'See this old man and old woman who brought a foundling from the market and are saying: He is our son, and moreover they are making a great feast to bolster their claim.' What did Abraham, our forefather, do? He went and invited all of the great of that generation, and Sarah, our foremother, invited their wives. Each and every one of the wives brought her child with her but did not bring her wet nurse. And a miracle occurred to Sarah, our foremother... and she nursed all of these children. And still those people were gossiping and saying to each other, 'Even if Sarah, at ninety years of age, can give birth, can Abraham, at one hundred years of age, father a child?' Immediately, the countenance of Isaac's face transformed and appeared exactly like that of Abraham. Everyone exclaimed and said, 'Abraham fathered Isaac'?!"

Now, Rashi is understood, being that the princesses, knowing that Abraham fathered Ishmael at the age of 86, only questioned Sarah's being post-menopause, having a son. Only scoffers to illogically question Abraham's fathering a son. Nevertheless, G-d did not even the scoffers to gossip, "He shaped the features of Isaac's face to resemble Abraham's, and everyone attested that Abraham had begotten Isaac."

-Cont. on page 4

1. When his older brothers were pointing out to the Rebbe MaHaRaSH (-[Link](#)) that they were older than him., the Rebbe responded, "And I am older with father's years." Meaning that their father, the Tzemach Tzedek (-[Link](#)) was older and in greater spiritual heights when the Rebe MaHaRaSH was born.
2. Hence, Rashi explains Abraham's, "Will [a child] be born to one who is a hundred years old," as, "Was such kindness done to anyone else, that the Holy One, blessed be He, is doing for me?," while Sarah's, "Laughed within herself, saying, 'After I have become worn out, will I have smooth flesh?,'" with, "Is it possible that these insides will carry a child; that these breasts, which have dried up, will give forth milk?" For Sarah's having a child at the age of 90 was a miracle, while Abraham's having a child at the age of 100 was not a miracle, but a kindness. Sarah, however, not knowing of Abraham's virility, additionally stated, "And also, my master is old."

Let us now consider Rashi's not, *"The reason that the word 'years' was written after every digit is to tell you that every digit is to be expounded upon,"* by Ishmael. Rashi doesn't need to specify which two characteristics the verse is expounding here, because from Abraham we already know that *"at 100 as at 30"* ((-Ethics 5:22), *"At 30 for strength"*), is referring to Ishmael's being extraordinary strong (virile), and, *"at 30 as at 7,"* is referring to Ishmael being *sinless*, as (-Rashi, Genesis 25:9), *"Ishmael repented."*

However, from the comment that Rashi does make upon the verse' stating the amount of years that Ishmael lived, *"In order to trace through them the years of Jacob,"* meaning that verse is not here, *"is to tell you that every digit is to be expounded upon."* More so, according to Rashi's comment, by Ishmael, what is, *"The reason that the word 'years' was written after every digit"?!*

Therefore, in the case of Ishmael, we are forced to say that (as explained earlier, that after explaining it by Abraham) Rashi had no reason to specify how, *"every digit is to be expounded upon."* Rather, Rashi is troubled by, for what purpose does the Torah altogether tell us the amount of years that Ishmael lived?! And Rashi's answer is that this isn't about Ishmael, but about Jacob. Deeper yet, being that this verse is all about Jacob's life, hence, the, *"The reason that the word 'years' was written after every digit is..."*, within this verse is not (just) about Ishmael, but primarily about Jacob. Therefore, these very characteristics mentioned by Ishmael (*No Loss of Strength; Sinless*) are actually to emphasize them by Jacob, and specifically how it was exponentially different in how they were by Jacob and how they were by Ishmael:

- (i) *At 100 -Teshuvah:* Even though Ishmael at the age of 100³ already did *Teshuvah* (repentance; return), to the point that the Torah uses for him the vernacular, *"And he expired,"* Rashi: "Heb. **וַיָּגוּעַ** [The term] **גִּיּוּעָה** *is mentioned only regarding the righteous,*" nevertheless, Ishmael's being a *Baal Teshuvah* (Returnee) was exponentially inferior to the righteousness of Jacob.
- (ii) *At 30 -Strength:* Even though, *"30 for strength,"* and how much more so by Ishmael, who was (-ibid 16:12), *"his hand will be upon all,"* nevertheless, Ishmael's strength was exponentially inferior to the strength of Jacob, as Rashi explains upon the verse (-ibid 29:10), *"Jacob drew near and rolled the rock off the mouth of the well,"* that, *"As one who removes the stopper from a bottle, to let you know that he possessed great strength,"* which according to Rashi, Jacob was 77 at the time!
- (iii) *At 7 -Sinless:* And even here, where the being sinless is about being a child, free of sin, and seemingly Jacob's and Ishmael's being sinless as children are of the same category, the verse is teaching us that here too, *'Little-Ishmael's* being sinless was exponentially inferior to *"Little-Jacob's"* being sinless.

The entire *being-ness* of Jacob was completely different than the *being-ness* of Ishmael, being that Ishmael was the son of a maidservant⁴. Hence, all the *details* of Jacobs characteristics were entirely different than those of Ishmael. This is why the entire verse of Ishmael's years of life (and its, *"every digit is to be expounded upon"*) was only, *"In order to trace through them the years of Jacob."*

- 3. Ishmael repented before Abraham died (*"Ishmael repented... and that is the meaning of 'a good old age' which is stated regarding Abraham"*) and Ishmael was 89 at the time of death of Abraham, being that Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born, and died at the age of 175 (175-86=89).
- 4. When Abraham directs Elazar concerning finding a wife for Isaac (-Genesis 24:6), *"Beware, lest you return my son back there (outside of Israel),"* but rather (-ibid, verse 8), *"And if the woman will not wish to go after you, you will be absolved of this, my oath; only do not return my son back there,"* Rashi comments, *"And take him a wife from the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre,"* but not of the offspring of Ishmael. Seemingly, we can now say that Rashi's reasoning being that Ishmael, unlike Aner, Eshkol, and Mamre, was the offspring of a maidservant. However, this answer requires more research, being that when Elazar speaks to Laban about Rebecca's returning with him to Israel, *"And if not, tell me, and I will turn to the right or to the left,"* and Rashi comments, *"to the right': From the daughters of Ishmael."*