

The Torah tells us that, at some point, each of the patriarchs experienced an all-encompassing fear, יראה. Abraham experienced it at the *בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים* when he was told that his children would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years. Isaac experienced fear and prejudice when he was forced by famine to relocate and he considered traveling to Egypt until Gd reassures him and commands him to remain in the land of Canaan. Abimelech evicts him from the land of Philistim and he is again concerned until Gd appears to him and reassures him.

Jacob experiences fear twice. The first time in the aftermath of the episode of Isaac's blessings. This feeling of fear begins when he fears for his life as Esau has resolved to murder him, continues with the fear associated with fleeing to Laban's house and contending with a deceitful father-in-law intent on uprooting everything sacred Jacob stood for. It continues with the fear he felt upon his return from Charan, when he was confronted again with Esau and the looming battle with his brother's army and a potential catastrophe. The second instance of fear expressed by Jacob is on his way to Egypt to reunite with his cherished son Joseph.

When it comes to expressing or verbalizing their fears, only Jacob expresses his fear and only with regards to his initial fear associated with fleeing from Esau and prior to their confrontation when he returns from Charan. Neither Abraham or Isaac verbalizes their fear, nor does Jacob when he is about to descend to Egypt. Yet G-d consistently appears to each of them and reassures them, *אֵל תִּירָא*, implying that they did indeed experience a gripping fear. What was the basis of this fear and how did their encounter with Gd reassure them?

As the original recipient of the Covenant, Abraham should have been the logical person to begin the exile that was foretold in the covenant Gd made with him. Indeed, some interpret his travels and travails in Egypt and throughout his life as the beginning of the exile period. Abraham was fearful that the exile was imminent. Gd reassured him that the fourth generation will ultimately return to the land, but he, Abraham, will not suffer this exile.

When faced with the famine gripping the land of Canaan, Isaac decided to follow in his father's footsteps, and descend to Egypt. Gd told him to remain in the land he was dwelling in, Philistim. When Abimelech tells him to leave, Isaac is suddenly homeless. Where should he go? He is gripped by fear. He asks himself is this the beginning of the exile that Gd promised my father? Will I be forced to fulfill this exile in my life for some transgression I may have committed that is making the debt come due earlier than originally planned? He instinctively follows his father's footsteps and travels to Beer Sheva. Like Abraham before, Gd appears to him in a

dream and reassures him. Isaac you are covered by the same clause in the covenant I made with Abraham. You will not go down to Egypt under any circumstances. Your problem with Abimelech will be short lived for I am with you. Once Abimelech realizes that you are special like your father before, he will come to his senses and offer to live peacefully with you as he did with Abraham. Isaac builds an altar in the place he would soon call Beer Sheva to thank Gd for the reassurance and promise of protection from exile.

Jacob was gripped by fear three times. The first time was when he departed his father's house, pursued by his brother Esau. Hashem appeared to him in Beit El and reassured him that He will return Jacob to his father's house safe and sound. Laban will have no influence over him, physically or spiritually. Jacob is reassured that this episode will not mark the beginning of the exile foretold to his grandfather Abraham. He indeed will return home from **this** exile. The second time Jacob acknowledges his fear is when he returns from Charan and is confronted by Esau who is marching out to meet him in battle with 400 mercenaries. Jacob experiences an existential fear at this point. Should he flee and forego returning to his father's house? He arrives at a plan to extricate himself from his dire predicament. He avoids the final confrontation with Esau at this point as they eventually go their own ways. Jacob tells Esau that eventually he will reach Mount Sayir, when their final confrontation concludes with the coming of the Messiah. He realizes that their current encounter cannot be their final confrontation, as neither of them have experienced the exile promised to Abraham.

After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and Jacob was informed that he is the viceroy of Egypt, Jacob departed for Egypt. However, he suddenly took a detour and headed to Beer Sheva. Jacob realized that the circumstances driving his decision to travel to Egypt were eerily familiar. Like his father and grandfather before him, he was faced with a decision whether or not to travel to Egypt to escape a famine in the land of Canaan. He asked himself if this was perhaps another temporary detour from which he will return once again. Or is this the beginning of the long-awaited exile, an exile he managed to avoid for all these years. Just like his father before him, he was gripped with an uncertainty and fear about the exile. He returned to the very place where many years before, his father prayed to Gd for guidance when he was troubled with the same questions.

It is interesting to note that unlike other instances where the patriarchs prayed to Gd, Jacob does not build an altar in Beer Sheva. Perhaps the reason is that Isaac had already built an altar in Beer Sheva many years before. That altar was built when Isaac was faced with the same question Jacob now faced: was the exile

beginning now? Jacob returns to that same spot and asks the same questions. This time the answer is different. He is told to descend to Egypt and that he will ultimately return. However, this is indeed the beginning of the long-promised exile.

Fulfillment of Abraham's covenant with Gd required that a people enter a foreign land and that same people exit after their long period of servitude. Jacob must be certain that his children are ready to survive a long exile in a way that Isaac's children could not. Isaac's two children were as different as possible temperamentally and ideologically. Esau was a rampaging hunter in whose footsteps death and destruction followed. Such a person and his descendants as detailed at the end of פרשת וישלח could not retain a distinction as Isaac's son and Abraham's grandson under the best of conditions, let alone in exile. Jacob's twelve children all followed in their father's path. Where Esau married Canaanite women who were as deceitful and wicked as he was, the family of Jacob was relatively pure of the abhorrent Canaanite genealogy. According to some opinions, Judah's 2 sons, ער and אונן died because they were descended from a Canaanite woman. Their Canaanite traits were evident in the way they treated Tamar. Only a family united in its belief in the one true Gd and steeped in the traditions of Abraham and Isaac could survive the ordeal of exile. Unity required the brothers accept each other and the roles they were to play in Jewish destiny. They had to accept Joseph for what he was: the true leader of the brothers. If even one of them was not ready, the entire enterprise would be doomed.

Gd would not let Jacob descend into exile in Egypt until his family was ready for it. Indeed, prior to Jacob's passing he attempted to reveal the future to his children, but he was stymied. He feared he was prevented because one of his children rebelled against him and his Gd. Many years before, Jacob refrained from rebuking Reuben over the incident where Reuben interceded to upset Jacob's relationship with his wives, out of fear that Reuben would rebel against Jacob and join Esau's camp. Perhaps his fear had been realized. His children reassured him that they were united with him, and jointly pronounced שמע ישראל, Hear O' Israel our father that we are united in accepting the yoke of Heaven. Jacob knew they were prepared to withstand the coming exile.

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