

And when Yitzchak grew old, his eyesight failed and he could not see. (27:1)

One is hard pressed to believe that our Avos, Patriarchs, succumbed to the natural frailties of ill health and infirmity that are often associated with the aging process. Yet, here we see Yitzchak Avinu, the *Olah Temimah*, perfect sacrifice, becoming a victim to old age. The *Rashi* (quoting *Midrash Rabbah* 65:10), to which we are all acquainted, explains that Yitzchak's waning eyesight, his premature myopia, had not been naturally induced; rather, he was a victim of the "side-effects" of the *Akeidah*, Binding. Apparently, when he was lying bound on the Altar of the *Akeidah*, and his father, Avraham Avinu, stood poised over him, knife in hand, prepared to slaughter him, the sight was too much for the Ministering Angels. They cried bitterly, and their tears fell into Yitzchak's eyes. As a result, in Yitzchak's old age, his vision weakened. Obviously, *Chazal's* words are steeped in allegory. Nonetheless, it behooves us to understand what unique ingredient of the Angels' tears could have induced Yitzchak's blindness. Furthermore, I have always been bothered by the delayed-effect of the Angels' tears. Why did it take a lifetime, until Yitzchak became old and infirm, for his diminished eyesight to set in?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, offers an insightful explanation. The above *Midrash* is based upon a *pasuk* in *Yeshayahu* 33:7, "Angels cried out openly; messengers of peace wept bitterly." The second half of this *pasuk* is the key to understanding *Chazal's* statement concerning Yitzchak's premature blindness. Like all angels, these "messengers of peace" were just that: angels sent by Hashem with a singular mission, peace. These angels of mercy were the epitome of *shalom*, the ultimate personification of peace. They were intensely compassionate and incapable of any negative perspective on any given subject. Their tears were tears of pure compassion – no room for tough love, just total mercy.

When these angels looked down at the *Akeidah*, at an elderly father about to slaughter his only son – they began to weep. Their tears, which were a manifestation of their extreme compassion, fell onto Yitzchak's eyes, resulting in altering his ability to perceive anything but compassion. Yitzchak could see only good in others, unable to comprehend anything negative about another person, regardless of his apparent faults and shortcomings. Thus, Yitzchak was prepared to bless Eisav, regardless of his son's deficiencies.

Perhaps this is why his eyesight diminished most with age. When the angels gazed upon the *Akeidah*, they saw a traumatic scene, an old father about to slaughter his only son. While these were angels of peace and compassion, their compassion was related most to the scenario of an aged father. Ostensibly, Yitzchak's perception of anything negative was stunted, but his true Angel-induced compassion peaked when he was an old father about to bless his son. The compassion of the Angels jumpstarted at this moment. He may not have seen until then all of the negative activities of his errant son, Eisav, but, at this moment, Eisav was as distant from sin (in Yitzchak's stunted eyes) as Yaakov. So, why should he withhold blessing?

