

On the first day of the first month, you should set up the Mishkan of the Ohel Moed. (40:2)

Chazal (Midrash Tanchuma, Pikudei 11) teach that the construction of the *Mishkan* was completed within three months. *Tishrei, Mar Cheshvan, Kislev*. The people did not set up, however, until *Rosh Chodesh Nissan*, because Hashem wanted the festivities surrounding the erection of the *Mishkan* to be combined with the celebration of the birth of Yitzchak *Avinu*. What is there about Yitzchak *Avinu*'s birth, his entrance into the world, connects with the *Mishkan*? How do these two celebrations mesh, and what is the message for us?

Let us focus on Yitzchak's name, its source and what it represents vis-à-vis our nation. The angels appeared before Avraham *Avinu* with the Heavenly message: "You will have a son!" Sarah *Imeinu* overheard and reacted with "laughter"/incredulity. When Yitzchak was born, Sarah said, *Tzchok asah li Elokim, kol ha'shomea yitzachak li*, "G-d has made laughter for me, all that will hear will laugh for me" (*Bereishis 21:6*). As a result of this laughter (earlier, when Hashem had informed Avraham of the impending birth of Yitzchak, he, too, had laughed), the child was named Yitzchak. Nothing about having a baby is mirthful – especially amid such miraculous circumstances. Furthermore, it seems strange – almost incongruous – that the Patriarch who exemplifies *Middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice, and the *middah* of *Gevurah*, strength, would be give a name based upon a parent's reaction to the absurdity of his birth.

Indeed, *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that the term "yitzachak" (*kol ha'shomea yitzachak li*) sounds like a combination of the *kal*, simple pure conjugation, and *piel*, intensive conjugation of the verb, *tzchok*. In the *kal*, *tzchok* bespeaks a natural, almost involuntary, laughter, which we are unable to control due to the absurdity we face. *Tzachek*, in the *piel* form, alludes to the intentional mocking laughter, through which we jeer at the incongruity between the intention/plan and the act, between the desire and the achievement. Two words *tzchok* and *tzachek*, which seem to be pulling in different directions – one involuntary laughter, the other purposeful mockery.

Avraham and Sarah lived a life in which they swam against the tide of world opinion and culture. This "elderly couple" even believed that their work would continue with the "heir" to their legacy. How absurd! Can we really believe anyone for involuntary smirking – even laughter? There will always be the contemptuous scoundrels who secure their high from mockery and jeering others. At the end of the day, conceiving, giving birth, and raising Yitzchak to follow in their footsteps and continue their noble legacy were really implausible and given somewhat to catalyze laughter. When we take into consideration that Yitzchak advanced to Patriarchal status as a result of the *Akeidah*, binding, this was a moment that personified *Din*, Strict Justice, at its apex. This was certainly no laughing matter. Indeed, what an idiosyncratic name for such a serious Patriarch.

Laughter is a natural response to the absurd, to that which is incongruous. The greater the absurdity, the more pronounced the incongruity, the more conspicuous the paradox, the more one

is inclined towards an expression of amusement. Yitzchak's birth was preposterous and outlandish, thus, Sarah was moved to laughter. Hers was a laughter of incredulity, of surprise and almost shock.

The *Akeidas Yitzchak* went against all rationale. After finally producing a son that would carry on his legacy, Avraham was commanded to slaughter him. Nothing within the realm of cogency can rationalize the *Akeidah* – other than this is the way a Jew lives. We do not demand “fair,” or cogent. Our conviction remains firm, even when the irrational confronts us. We live by the will of Hashem. What matters most in life is how one lives it. If his life conforms with Hashem's will – then he has lived. If he lives against Hashem's Will – that is absurd!

The world laughs at us. They mock us with derision and ridicule. Their laughter hails back to Yitzchak. They laughed at his conception, his birth, his binding at the *Akeidah*. Our presence in the world after all these years of persecution is absurd. Now, who is laughing? They have tried countless times to destroy us, but we are here. Is anything more unimaginable than our existence? Nothing is inconceivable before Hashem, because, when He does something – it is real; it is in order; it is appropriate; it is congruous. He – and only He – determines what is absurd. So the world can foolishly laugh. We, however, laugh back. Yitzchak laughs. Our nation laughs.

We now understand why Hashem wanted the celebration of the *Mishkan* to coincide with Yitzchak's “birthday.” Our nation has been bereft of its *Bais Hamikdash* for over 2,000 years. Our *Mikdash/Mishkan*, our Sanctuary, is no longer with us. We have been the focus of much derision during our exile. Hashem tells us: “Do not worry, you will yet laugh at the world, when the *Mishkan/Mikdash* is rebuilt.” Yes, we will laugh!