

## **"And Hashem said, 'Nevertheless, your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you should name him Yitzchak.'" (17:19)**

The name Yitzchak does not mean, "he who laughs," or "he who rejoices", it means "he who causes laughter," who brings a smile to the lips of his parents. Also, the word generally denotes an ironic form of laughter, brought about by something utterly ridiculous or inconceivable. Indeed, the fact that Yitzchak is given his name simply to "commemorate" the laughter his forthcoming birth provoked, is especially significant. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, in raising these issues, comes to the following conclusion.

To expect a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman, who had never before had children, to give birth to a child is truly anomalous. To then expect this child to be the progenitor of a great nation, which will be the hope for the future of mankind, is an added absurdity. To place the greatest, most noble aspirations upon the smallest, almost inconsequential beginnings is nonsensical and somewhat bizarre. This apparent disparity between present and future, between what seemed to be "reality" and what was promised, simply was too much for Avraham to bear. His immediate response to this "ridiculous" declaration was laughter. This burst of laughter was considered so characteristic that it was to be eternalized for all future generations in the name of the child that was to be born.

In this name lies the essence of Jewish survival from its early beginnings. To the one who considers natural cause and effect as the basis for survival, the Jewish people, its history, continued survival and Messianic hopes, must appear as the most inane and laughable pretension. Our existence only makes sense when we look at the "real" source which gives rise to all the other causalities – it is the will of the Almighty Who created, guides and wills into existence everything which occurs. The Avos, Patriarchs, were taught to realize this truth and transmit it to their descendants, to believe and keep uppermost in their minds.

This is why Hashem waited until the first Patriarch and Matriarch had reached an age which was "absurd" to be bearing a child. The first seed of our nation was specifically conceived at a time which was viewed as preposterous. He waited to produce the seeds of continuity at a time when all human hope for its realization had ended. He was creating a nation which would stand in opposition to all the laws of "nature" and world history, who would from their very beginnings be linked with a miracle, as a Divine sign of the Almighty's bond with them. They must, therefore, appear in a manner which to the spiritually obtuse would be an impossible phenomenon -- completely inexplicable, indicating the clear existence of a power which rises above the "laws of nature." The burst of laughter which accompanies the Jew throughout his tumultuous history confirms the existence of the Almighty Who protects them and guides them on the Divine path.