

The Cure for Loneliness in Three Chapters

You are fairer than the children of men; grace is poured on your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever (Psalm 45:3). Then Abraham asked, “Why am I fairer than the children of men? When I and my son enter a city, no one is capable of distinguishing between us.” (In those days) a man would live to be a hundred or two hundred years without acquiring the distinguishing features of old age. “It is imperative, Sovereign of All Creation, that You should distinguish between father and son, between old and young, so that the young may pay homage to the old.” The Holy One of Blessing replied, “You have loudly demanded old age. By your life, I will begin to distinguish between young and old with you.” Abraham went to sleep and when he awoke in the morning, he found that the hair of his head and his beard had turned white. “Sovereign of All Creation,” he exclaimed, “You have made me a public spectacle.” The Holy One of Blessing replied: *Your hoary head is a crown of glory.* (Proverbs 16:31) And it says elsewhere: *And the beauty of men is the hoary head.* (Proverbs 20:29) Hence, it is said: *And Abraham was old.* (Genesis 24:1)

Isaac said to the Holy One of Blessing: Sovereign of All Creation, when someone sins, you exact retribution from him all at once. Afflict him little by little, and you are exacting retribution from him. If you had brought afflictions upon the generation of the flood, they would not have rebelled against you. You, however, bestowed prosperity upon them. Therefore, they rebelled against you. Thus, it is stated: *The tents of robbers prosper and those who provoke God have security.* (Job 12:6) The Holy One of Blessing said to him, “You have loudly demanded afflictions. By your life, I am beginning with you.” Thus it is stated, *And it came to pass that Isaac was old [and his eyes were too dim to see].* (Genesis 27:1)

Jacob said to the Holy One of Blessing, “Sovereign of All Creation, one dwells in contentment. Then his life departs and strife comes into the world. For that reason, it is required for one to be in the hand of others, or, in the case of others, it is required for them to be in his hand. Now he dies suddenly and strife comes about in the world. Rather let [one] become [ill] for five or six days until he has ordained for his children everything that is necessary. Then let him depart from the world. The Holy One of Blessing said to him, “Jacob, you have demanded illness. By your life, I am beginning with you.” Thus it is stated: *And it came to pass after these things [that it was told] to Joseph: Behold your father is ill.* (Genesis 48:10)

This Midrash appears in various classical sources. I have drawn on several, primarily Genesis Rabbah 65:9. I encourage those of you who are familiar with Hebrew to examine the sources, two of which can be found at my Sefaria source sheet: <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/80260>.

GR 65:9, 97:1 BM 87a, Tanh, Gen 5:1, PRE 52 (above 2:20)