

## Parshat Toldot: Isaac's Blindness, As the Story Is Told

*When Isaac was old, his eyes grew too dim to see* (Genesis 27:1).

Isaac's blindness—the first infirmity mentioned in Scripture—sets the stage for deception and for two brothers' struggle over a birthright and a blessing. For one ancient sage, Isaac's blindness not only begins one story but it continues and deepens the traumatic story of Isaac's near death at his father's hand—a horror that remained with him, always:

*When Isaac was old, his eyes grew too dim to see.* (Genesis 27:1) Literally, the verse reads: *And it was that Isaac grew old and his eyes grew dim from seeing.* The unnamed sage teaches that Isaac was scarred by what he and the terrified angels had seen, his eyes weakened...*by the power of that sight; for at the hour that Abraham, our Father, bound his son on top of the altar, the ministering angels cried. And those tears fell from their eyes into Isaac's eyes and they left traces in his eyes, as it is written: And it was that Isaac grew old and his eyes grew dim from seeing.*

The sage has an ally in the Israeli poet, Hayim Gouri:

*Isaac, as the story is told, was not sacrificed.  
He lived a long life,  
saw the good, until his eyes dimmed.*

*But that hour he bequeathed to his descendants.  
They are born  
with a knife in their hearts.*

The phrase, *as the story is told*, can ring with assurance or with skepticism. The ancient sage secures his insight regarding Isaac's traumatized life to the story of his weak eyes precisely, literally, as the story is told in the verse: *his eyes grew weak from seeing*.

The poet, on the other hand, is skeptical that the nearly sacrificed Isaac could have lived a normal life: *As the story is told*, Isaac was not sacrificed. But the poet does not believe it. In some sense, Isaac was sacrificed, his life forfeited. *As the story is told*, Isaac *saw the good, until his eyes dimmed*. But how much goodness could Isaac have seen and appreciated from *that hour onward until his eyes dimmed*?

Not only did Isaac carry *that sight* all of his life, but it became the legacy of his descendants—as the story is told by the sage and by the poet.