

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Chayei Sarah

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

EQUIPPED FOR THE CHALLENGE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

Rashi explains that Sarah's death is written in the Torah immediately after the episode of Avraham's trial of sacrificing Yitzchak because after hearing what was about to transpire, she became so distressed that “her soul flew from her and she died.”

Rashi tells us that Sarah was on a greater level of prophecy than Avraham. Yet we see that Avraham passed every stage of this great test, from rising early in the morning to carry out the word of Hashem, to the very last moment of lifting the knife to perform the sacrifice. On the other hand, at the very first moment when Sarah heard what was taking place, she could not cope with the distress and died on the spot! How could Sarah, who was a greater Prophet, not be able to cope with this test at the first hurdle, whereas Avraham was able to complete everything to perfection?

One of the answers that Rav Chaim Shmuelevits offers is that sacrificing Yitzchak was not actually Sarah's test, and as such, she was not given the Heavenly Assistance to pass it. For it is only when Hashem Himself provides the test are we able to withstand it, because with every test comes the means to pass it. Even though Sarah was a greater Prophet, this test was not hers to pass, and she therefore did not have the means and Heavenly Assistance to succeed.

This message is echoed by Rav Eliezer Zusha Portugal, the first Skulener Rebbe, in his answer to a perplexing question on the words “ברוך גוזר ומקים - Blessed is He who decrees and makes it stand” said in the Baruch She'amar prayer at the beginning of Pesukei D'zimra: “Is it not strange,” asked the Rebbe, “that we are praising Hashem not only for making a decree against us, but we go further and praise Him for fulfilling it?” The answer, says the Rebbe, is that we are supposed to read the words like this: “Blessed is He, that when He decrees, He gives the person who He has decreed against, the ability to withstand it.”

INTERNAL SATISFACTION

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

All her years were equal in goodness. (Rashi)

Avraham and Sarah survived whatever fate threw at them, however much it seemed to derail their mission, and despite everything they found serenity at the end of their lives.

They knew that what makes a life satisfying is not external but internal, a sense of purpose, mission, being called, summoned, of starting something that would be continued by those who came after them, of bringing something new into the world by the way they lived their lives.

What mattered was the inside, not the outside; their faith, not their often-troubled circumstances.

IT'S ALL GOOD

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

Rashi comments that when the Torah sums up Sarah's life with the words “shnei chayei Sarah,” the Torah is teaching us that Sarah's years were all equally good.

Rashi is difficult to understand. What does he mean when he explains that the years of Sarah's life were all equally good? Sarah had a very hard life that included not being able to have children until she was very old, being taken captive twice and moving around a number of times. How could Rashi suggest that Sarah's life was so good?

The Noam Elimelech explains that Rashi's insight is based on Sarah's perspective, and not ours. To an observer, Sarah's life appears to have been difficult. However, Sarah was on such a high level of righteousness that from her vantage point everything was always good. Sarah believed that everything from Hashem was for her ultimate benefit, through thick and thin.

As we progress through life, we find ourselves asking at times, “Why is this happening to me? Why can't I catch a break?” We need to internalize Sarah's approach and realize that we are meant to confront obstacles, and that we should embrace them with a positive outlook because they will help us grow. Let us keep in mind that if Hashem brought us to it, He will certainly bring us through it and we will come out of every experience better than ever!

ALWAYS IN HER PRIME

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

At one hundred, she was like a woman of twenty regarding sin. (Rashi)

The Torah relates that Sarah always combined in her personality the virtues of youth and those of old age.

When she was only twenty, she had the virtues of old age calmness and moderation. But when she was one hundred years old, she was still blessed with the zeal, vitality and enthusiasm usually associated with a young woman of twenty.

LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

Reb Noson of Nemirov

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

All her years were equal in goodness. (Rashi)

One hundred years represent the one hundred blessings we should recite daily. All these blessings are drawn through our prayers - i.e., “the words of our mouths” - which are formed from the twenty-seven letters of the Hebrew alphabet (there are twenty-two letters plus five final consonants). Thus, the one hundred blessings and twenty-seven letters combine to make “Sarah's life” - a good life, a life of G-dliness. (Likutey Halachot V, p. 458)

At one hundred, she was like a twenty-year-old, who is without sin. At twenty, she was as beautiful as a girl of seven. And all her years were equal in goodness. (Rashi)

There are four levels of humility: to be more humble than those who are greater than you, to be more humble than your equals, to be more humble than those who are lesser than you, and, if you are the most humble person, to become even more humble (see Likutey Moharan I, 14:4).

The essence of life, especially in the World to Come, is one's humility (see Likutey Moharan II, 72).

Sarah reflects the fourth level of humility, that of being the most humble person. Whether she was one hundred, twenty or seven, she kept humbling herself more. And “all her days were good,” for in this way, she attained true humility, which is the essence of life.

THIS TOO IS FOR THE BEST

Reb Zusia of Anipoli

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

All her years were equal in goodness. (Rashi)

Weren't most of Sarah's years filled with hardships - longing for children, living in exile, imprisonment at the hands of Pharaoh and Avimelech? How could all her years have been equally good? The answer, of course, is that during her entire life, concerning everything that was seemingly bad, Sarah would always say, “This, too, is for the best.” Sarah saw Hashem's kindness in everything. We must try to emulate her and do the same.

ATTACKED FROM ALL SIDES

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life.” (23:1)

The Midrash says that immediately following Sarah's death, היה רואה מלאך המות מתריס כנגדו - Avraham saw the angel of death taunting him.

Rav Dovid Povarsky explains this comment based on a different teaching of the Midrash, that Sarah died as a result of Akeidas Yitzchak. A messenger informed Sarah that her husband had taken her only son to a mountaintop, drew a knife, and was prepared to slaughter him. Upon hearing this, Sarah went into shock and perished. The Satan's “taunting” of Avraham was thus the next phase of the test of Akeidas Yitzchak. The Midrashim describe how the Satan tried to dissuade Avraham as he made his way to the Akeidah, and convince him not to obey the command to slaughter his son. Now, after Avraham withstood this unimaginable test, the Satan did not stop. It continued by trying to have Avraham regret the Akeidah. When Avraham returned home and saw that his wife had died as a result of what happened, he was challenged by the thought that perhaps it was a mistake to obey Hashem's command. This was the “taunting” of the Satan. Avraham faced a new challenge - the challenge to firmly believe that he had done the right thing despite the personal loss he suffered as a result.

This is the meaning of the prayer we recite each night in ma'ariv, והסר שטן מלפנינו ומאחרינו - asking that Hashem eliminate the Satan “from before us and from behind us.” We need Hashem's assistance to resist the yetzer ha'ra מלפנינו, in front of us, as we reach our decisions as to how to act and what to do. But we also need protection from the yetzer ha'ra מאחרינו, after the fact, once we have done what was right. Quite often, after making the right decision, acting the way we should have acted, things do not work out the way we wanted. When this happens, the Satan is there “taunting us”; we might be lured to regret our decision. We therefore ask Hashem to save us not only from our inclination to act wrongly, but also from our inclination to regret acting correctly when the results are not what we wanted.

IT'S IN HASHEM'S HANDS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And the life of Sarah was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years - the years of Sarah's life." (23:1)

Chazal tell us that Sarah's neshamah departed from shock upon hearing of Avraham's intention to sacrifice Yitzchak. One might think that this was the actual cause of her death, and had she never heard the news of the Akeidah from the Satan, she would have continued to live. Therefore, the pasuk concludes: (these are) the years of the life of Sarah. Since the time had come for Sarah to depart from This World, Hashem caused her to enter into a state of shock that caused her death.

Rav Avraham Pam zt'l adds an additional insight into these words with an incident that took place during the shiva for his father. His brothers were discussing how perhaps their father may have lived longer had they tried a different doctor or treatment. Their mother abruptly interrupted their conversation and exclaimed, "Papa's time was up. We did our hishtadlus and the rest was up to Hashem."

Although we must put forth hishtadlus in all matters, success is ultimately in the hands of Hashem. How many jobs, shidduchim and business deals come about because of an unexpected suggestion of a friend or unknown person and have nothing to do with a person's efforts? The Chovos Halevavos (Sha'ar Habitachon) writes: "How foolish are people who put their trust in their hishtadlus." He compares this to a stray dog that was disturbing people in the street until a police officer picked up a large stick and chased it away. When the officer left, the dog ran over and took revenge on the stick by chewing it and stamping on it. How silly. The stick did nothing wrong, why should the dog attack it?

We must recognize that in our lives as well, the very thing that seems to be the cause of a particular occurrence is most likely not the cause at all. We are all pawns in the hands of Hashem, Who is the Master Controller of the world. Thus, even when we seek our parnassah through conventional methods, Hashem often sends it in a totally unconventional manner to teach us that control of the world rests solely in His hands.

THE ETERNITY OF THE SOUL

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"...and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her." (23:2)

Parshas Chayei Sarah opens with the passing of Sarah Imeinu, and the Torah relates that Avraham wept and eulogized his beloved wife. The Ba'al Ha'turim observes that the letter כ in the word ולבכותה (to bewail her) is written in a smaller size than the rest of the letters of the Torah. This small כ, the Ba'al HaTurim explains, indicates that Avraham's weeping and grief was tempered; he did not cry excessively over Sarah's passing.

The obvious question arises as to why this should be. Sarah was a righteous woman, and Avraham's life partner. They had been together for many decades, until old age. They had experienced and endured so much together. She was a crucial part of everything he did.

(In fact, Rav Soloveitchik observed that after Sarah's passing, it seems that Avraham's public activity ceased. All that we read of Avraham doing after Sarah's death is finding a wife for Yitzchak. Apparently, without Sarah, Avraham could not continue his work.)

Why would his anguish be tempered?

Rav Yaakov Galinsky, in Ve'higadeta, explains that Avraham toned down his weeping for an educational purpose.

Avraham had devoted his life to teaching the world about G-d, and about the eternity of the soul, the world to come. As I always tell grieving relatives, Judaism teaches that we bury only the body. We do not bury a parent, a grandparent, a husband or a wife. We bury only the body, but the person lives forever. This is why Chazal refer to death with the expression יציאת נשמה - "the departure of the soul." All that happens at death is the soul's departure from the body. The soul remains intact, and continues existing for all eternity.

If Avraham would have wept excessively, expressing unbearable pain and anguish, this could have threatened to shake the faith of his followers. They might have regarded his pain as contradictory to everything he had taught them about the immortality of the soul.

And so Avraham tempered his grief for the educational purpose of assuring his followers that as painful as a loved one's loss is, we can take at least some degree of comfort in the knowledge that the soul exists eternally, and we will all be reunited in the next world.

THE PERFECT STARTING POINT

HaDerash VeHalyun

"...and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her." (23:2)

From where did he come? From Har HaMoriah. (Midrash)

When Avraham wanted to rehearse the many virtues of his departed wife, he began with the story of Yitzchak's sacrifice on Har HaMoriah.

The fact that Sarah had succeeded in training her son to be willing to sacrifice his life for G-d showed what manner of woman she had been.

This is the explanation of the statement quoted above from the Midrash, "From where had Avraham come?" At what point did Avraham, in his eulogy, begin the story of Sarah's life? From Har HaMoriah - with the event that took place on Har HaMoriah, which gave him ample material for a eulogy.

IN THE PROPER TIME

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"...and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her." (23:2)

A number of years ago, a terrible tragedy occurred in Eretz Yisrael, when a well-known, righteous woman was killed in a car accident. When R' Chaim Kanievsky zt'l came to the house to be menachem avel - comfort the mourner(s), he was asked:

"How is this possible? This lady was a teacher on her way to teach her young students Torah and mitzvos, and we know that the Gemara (Pesachim 8) says, 'Shluhei mitzvah ainan nizokin - [one who is] on his way to perform a mitzvah will not be injured!' How could such a terrible misfortune have happened?"

R' Chaim answered by quoting the words of Rashi in the beginning of Parshas Chayei Sarah: "The death of Sarah is close to [the parsha of] Akeidas Yitzchak, because after she heard how her son was almost slaughtered, her soul left her, and she died."

It would seem that Sarah Imeinu died as a direct result of the Akeidah. But again, how is this possible? Can we fathom the thought that the great Sarah Imeinu died from a broken heart?

The answer, explained R' Chaim, is that it is not the performance of mitzvos that causes a person to pass away. Rather, it is when Hashem decides that a person has fulfilled his or her purpose on this world and is now ready to move on to a greater reward in the World to Come.

If he or she is a tzaddik who lived a life of righteous piety, like the life of our Matriarch Sarah, then Hashem will bring about that person's death by way of a mitzvah. This adds glory to the person, for it appears that he or she died with an extra measure of mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice).

Furthermore, Chazal tell us regarding a person who dies in the midst of fulfilling a mitzvah, that it's as if he has fulfilled the entire Torah!

Thus, never look at death as "untimely." It is always "timely." Hashem evaluates a person's actions and adjusts his "time" on this world accordingly.

SOULFUL ZEAL

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"He spoke with them, saying, 'If it is your desire to bury my dead from before me, hear me and intercede for me with Ephron the son of Tzochar.'" (23:8)

Nafshekem (נפשכם, your desire) comes from the same root as Nefesh (נפש, soul). The extent of one's desire is seen in the devotions of his soul. If his Ratzon (רצון, will) to serve G-d is great, he will Ratz (רץ, run) to serve G-d. (Likutey Halachot II, p. 262)

FLOURISHING FAITH

Rebbe Nachman

"He spoke with them, saying, 'If it is your desire to bury my dead from before me, hear me and intercede for me with Ephron the son of Tzochar.'" (23:8)

The name Ephron (עפרון) shares the same Hebrew root as Aphar (עפר, earth), indicating laziness and depression, a lack of faith. Faith, in contrast, is compared to sprouting and growth. (See Likutey Moharan I, 155)

SEEING THE LIGHT

Rebbe Nachman

"Let him give me the Cave of Machpeilah, which is his, in the corner of his field. Let him give it to me for the full price, in your presence, for a burial ground." (23:9)

A great light existed in the Cave of Machpeilah, shining out from Gan Eden. But Ephron did not see this light, and so he was eager to sell the cave. Avraham did see the light, and he knew that it marked the gateway to Gan Eden. Thus, he was eager to purchase the cave.

Similarly, both the common person and the tzaddik are exposed to awesome levels of G-dliness that abound in the world, but only the tzaddik appreciates them. A wise person strives to overcome his foolishness and material desires in order to come close to the tzaddik, who can then reveal to him that awesome Divine beauty. (See Likutey Moharan I, 17:2)

DANGERS OF VANITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Ephron lived in the midst of the sons of Cheis. Ephron the Chittite replied to Avraham in the ears [audience] of the sons of Cheis, for all who came to the city gate..." (23:10)

In the city of Lublin, there was a young man who worked in the mikvah, known as the "boot remover." Among his other duties, which included cleaning up and ensuring the mikvah's continuous use, he added another "service" to his repertoire. Many, if not most, of the streets in Lublin were muddy; some were paved with stones and others were dirt tracks, but almost all were mud-stained. The people of Lublin tended to wear high boots so as not to get themselves dirty. The problem was that these boots were difficult to remove. People would pull and tug and quite often would expend energy futilely: the boots would simply not come off.

The mikvah attendant hit upon a plan, whereby for a few coins, he would do the pulling and tugging.

One time, he was helping a man remove his boots and he pulled so hard that the man let out a yelp. "You're going to pull off my leg," cried the man in pain.

"Don't tell me what to do," retorted the young attendant in a loud and pompous voice. "Do you know who I am? I am the greatest 'boot-remover' in the world!"

Nimshal: A person can live his life on a low level and still think that he is great. Ephron was an ordinary member of the Chittite nation. He was no better than anyone else.

Yet the moment the “Prince of G-d,” Avraham Avinu, arrived in Chevron looking to buy his land, he suddenly became a celebrity! Now he thought of himself as a serious player.

Vanity is a terrible sin, says the Ropshitzer Rav, R' Natali Hurvitz zt'l, and no one is immune.

SUBJECTIVE LOVE

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Four hundred silver shekel - what is that between me and you?” (23:15)

An unusual and unlikely “friendship” seems to have sprung up between Avraham Avinu and the owner of the land that he wished to purchase, Ephron Hachiti.

In fact, Rashi describes their relationship as such, for when Ephron finally consented to sell the Me'aras Machpeilah to Avraham, he demanded four hundred silver coins, illogically reasoning, “Between ohavim - friends such as us, is [four hundred shekel] of significant value?”

First of all, when did these two men become such good friends? Why would Avraham have a “friend” such as Ephron?

And lastly, since when is four hundred silver pieces - a considerable sum in those days - to be considered not of “significant value”?

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe, R' Chaim Meir Hagar zt'l, reconciles the words of Rashi with a novel approach.

In fact, Avraham Avinu was not a friend of Ephron, since Ephron was a boorish Canaanite, undisciplined, unrighteous, and unworthy of even conversing with a tzaddik like Avraham. Rather, the two of them were “ohavim - people who loved and adored” - albeit the objects of their desire were quite different and distinct from one another.

Avraham loved to perform mitzvos and good deeds, and thought nothing of spending a great deal of money to accomplish a task which he believed to be in the service of Hashem.

Ephron, on the other hand, loved money, a great deal of money, and only those amounts that he perceived as rich and vast were deemed worthy of going after. Anything less was not worth his while.

Thus, he tells Avraham, “Look, we both love and cherish things - from different perspectives, of course. But the common denominator is this: Between me and you, four hundred shekel is no big deal!”

SPIRITUAL HOTSPOT

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“Avraham heard Ephron, and Avraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had mentioned in the hearing of the children of Cheis - four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency.” (23:16)

After Sara's death, Avraham purchased the area of Me'aras Machpeilah as a burial site. He bought the land from a wily, duplicitous man named Ephron, who charged an exorbitant price - 400 silver pieces.

In the pasuk which tells of Avraham paying this outrageous sum to Ephron (23:16), the Torah spells Ephron's name as עפרון instead of עפרון, omitting the letter ו'. Rashi explains, “The ו' is missing because he [Ephron] said a lot but did not even do a little.” Ephron spoke to Avraham in very lofty terms, as though he was exceedingly generous, but ultimately demanded an outrageous price for the land.

For what exactly is Ephron criticized, and how is this expressed through the omission of the letter ו'?

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck, in Lahavos Eish, explains by noting the famous pasuk in Sefer Devarim (4:4), “And you who cling to Hashem your G-d, you are alive today, all of you.” The Gemara (Kesubos 111b) raises the question of how it is possible to “cling” to G-d, whom the Torah later (Devarim 4:24) compares to a “devouring fire.” The answer, the Gemara explains, is that one is considered to “cling” to Hashem by connecting to righteous Torah scholars. If one has his daughter marry a talmid chacham, does business with a talmid chacham, or offers financial support to a talmid chacham, then מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו - he is considered to be “clinging” to Hashem through his association with a tzaddik.

Ephron, Rav Druck explains, was presented with a golden opportunity to “cling” to Hashem. He was approached by Avraham, G-d's ambassador to the world, the most righteous person in his time, with an offer to purchase a piece of land. Ephron could have seized this opportunity by offering Avraham a discounted price, by building a warm, amicable relationship with Avraham, through which he would then be connected to Hashem. Instead, Ephron decided to seize the opportunity to earn an enormous fortune. Knowing that Avraham was exceptionally wealthy, Ephron used this situation for profit, rather than as a chance to connect with the Shechina.

For this reason, Rav Druck writes, Ephron lost the letter ו'. This letter is added at the beginning of a word to mean “and.” It is the letter that connects words to one another, and it thus symbolizes attachment. The omission of the letter ו' from Ephron's name symbolizes the lost opportunity for a connection with Hashem, that Ephron chose to use Avraham's request for personal profit, rather than for building a relationship with G-d.

Later, the Torah elaborates at great length on the experiences of Avraham's servant, Eliezer, as he journeyed to Aram Naharayim to find a spouse for Yitzchak. The text of this section is unusually verbose, and Rashi (24:42) comments, "The conversation of the patriarchs' servants is greater...than the Torah of their sons." If the conversation of Eliezer, Avraham's servant, is precious and valuable, then certainly the conversations of the talmidei chachamim themselves are significant. We have so much to learn and gain from even everyday conversations with Torah giants, as this association strengthens our connection to Hashem.

I once heard this concept explained by way of an analogy to someone whose cell phone lost reception, and so, desperate for connectivity, he asks the fellow next to him to turn on his phone's hotspot so he can connect to it. There are times when we lose our "connectivity," when, for one reason or another, we find it difficult to directly connect to Hashem. While He of course wants all of us to connect to Him, no matter who we are, not always are we capable of connecting. By connecting to a talmid chacham, we use them as our "hotspot" through which we can build our connection to Hashem. Even when we feel spiritually frail, our association with a righteous person can facilitate our relationship with G-d. We are able to "cling" to G-d through our exposure to, and connection with, the tzaddikim who have mastered His Torah and set for us an example of how we should conduct our lives.

REMOVING KELIPOT

Reb Noson of Nemirov

"Avraham heard Ephron, and Avraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had mentioned in the hearing of the children of Cheis - four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency." (23:16)

For something as holy as the Cave of Machpeilah, which is the portal to Gan Eden and the gateway through which all souls pass after death, Avraham was willing to pay top dollar rather than receive it as a gift. This is because Jewish money that is used for the performance of mitzvot and Torah study is itself very holy and has the power to subdue the kelipot (forces that draw their energy from holiness). By purchasing the cave, Avraham indicated that he was willing to give of his wealth to subdue the kelipot that would surround this holy place. In this way, he revealed the spirituality and G-dliness that lay within. (Likutei Halakhot VIII, p. 10b)

The purchase of the Cave of Machpeilah constituted the beginning of the conquest of the Holy Land. Avraham bought it from the children of Cheis, the first of the seven nations. Cheit (חת) represents Chayat (חיה, wild beast) (Psalms 68:31). The Holy Land cannot be conquered unless we "break the beast" within us. (Likutei Halakhot II, p. 94)

THIRST QUENCHER

Rebbe Nachman

"Avraham heard Ephron, and Avraham weighed out to Ephron the silver that he had mentioned in the hearing of the children of Cheis - four hundred silver shekels in negotiable currency." (23:16)

Kesef (קסף, silver) is related to Kisufin (כסופין, yearning). The 400 silver shekels represent the 400 worlds of yearning that the tzaddikim will attain in the World to Come. (Zohar I, 123b)

The greater a person's spiritual thirst, the greater his pleasure when he quenches it. The reward of the tzaddikim in the World to Come will be the quenching of their great thirst for G-d. (See Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom # 259)

ELEVATING THE MUNDANE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Ephron's field of Machpeilah... and the cave in it... was confirmed as Avraham's purchase." (23:17-18)

The Hebrew word for "was confirmed" literally means "arose." This teaches us that just as the Machpeilah Cave rose from mundane to holy status when Avraham purchased it, so do we elevate physical objects when we use them for a holy purpose. In fact, our mere intention of using an object for spiritual purposes uplifts it - even before we use it - just as the Machpeilah field was lifted out of its former mundane status even before Avraham buried Sarah there. (Hitva'aduyot 5746, vol. 1, pp. 582-583)

Just as Avraham was not fazed by the highly inflated price he paid for the Machpeilah Cave, we too should not be deterred by apparently excessive expenditures of either money or effort when fulfilling our mandate to elevate the physical world. We should never underestimate the potential positive impact of our actions. (Sichot Kodesh 5733, vol. 1, pp. 128-132)

Furthermore, just as Avraham purchased the Machpeilah Cave permanently, establishing it as Jewish property for all time, we too should realize that when we elevate our personal portion of the world, we do so permanently and absolutely. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 35, pp. 84-86)

A BLESSING TO ALL

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"...and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (24:1)

A true tzaddik does not pray only for himself and his own personal needs. A tzaddik always has others on his mind and davens for all of mankind. In fact, he finds no satisfaction when he alone receives blessing, so as a result, when Heaven wishes to bless him, all the people around him are blessed as well.

This is what the pasuk tells us regarding Avraham Avinu: "And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." Everything that Avraham could have wished for was blessed, and this includes all those around him.

MORE WISDOM, MORE PEACE

Rebbe Nachman

"And Avraham was old, advanced in years, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (24:1)

"Old" represents wisdom. Through wisdom, Avraham was blessed with everything - which is to say, he attained peace. (See Likutey Moharan I, 27:7)

There are several principal levels of holiness, with interim levels between them. One must strive to ascend from level to level, taking care not to skip any of the interim levels.

"Ba b'yamim" (advanced in years) may also be translated as "he entered into many days." Avraham utilized every day and every moment of every day. Thus, he attained awesome levels of holiness, including the holiness found within the interim levels.

Even if a person does not utilize his days properly, he must at least strive to attain the principal levels of holiness, running quickly from one to the other. (See Likutey Moharan II, 59)

THINKING OF OTHERS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And Avraham was old, advanced in years, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (24:1)

The Kedushas Levi interprets the last five words of this pasuk very differently. He explains that the words "v'Hashem beirach es Avraham ba'kol" mean that Hashem blessed Avraham with everyone, not everything. In other words, being that Avraham was such a righteous person, the only way Avraham would accept a brachah from Hashem was if Hashem included everyone else in the brachah as well. Avraham wasn't interested in brachos unless he could share them with other people.

The Kedushas Levi is highlighting something so important. The appropriate way to daven and beseech Hashem is not to just focus on ourselves but to include others as well. The story is told of those people who would ask Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt'l, the Rosh Yeshivah of the Mir, what to think about when listening to the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. His response was to think about someone else.

This is the lesson that the Kedushas Levi is teaching us from Avraham Avinu. We must incorporate everyone who we can think of into our tefillos. If each of us includes and thinks about others, then we are all guaranteed to be the beneficiaries of Hashem's infinite brachos.

LIVING A FULL LIFE

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"And Avraham was old, advanced in years, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (24:1)

If you ensure that your children will continue to live for what you have lived for, then you can have faith that they will continue your journey until eventually they reach the destination.

Avraham did not need to see all the land in Jewish hands, nor did he need to see the Jewish people become numerous. He had taken the first step. He had begun the task, and he knew that his descendants would continue it. He was able to die serenely because he had faith in G-d and faith that others would complete what he had begun. The same was surely true of Sarah.

To place your life in G-d's hands, to have faith that whatever happens to you happens for a reason, to know that you are part of a larger narrative, and to believe that others will continue what you began, is to achieve a satisfaction in life that cannot be destroyed by circumstance. Avraham and Sarah had that faith, and they were able to die with a sense of fulfilment.

To be happy does not mean that you have everything you want or everything you were promised. It means, simply, to have done what you were called on to do, to have made a beginning, and then to have passed on the baton to the next generation.

"The righteous, even in death, are regarded as though they were still alive" because the righteous leave a living trace in those who come after them.

WEIGHING THE RISKS

Yalkut HaDerush

"...and Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had: 'Please put your hand under my thigh...'" (24:2)

As a rule, a man who is approached for a loan makes careful inquiry about the borrower's credit and reliability before granting the request. Only after the borrower's willingness and ability to repay have been established beyond a doubt, will the loan be extended. But, in matters of religious observance - such as establishing whether meat that was bought is ritually pure or whether a pair of tefillin is fit for ritual use - we are generally not as careful in our inquiries and are inclined to believe anyone who answers us in the affirmative.

Not so Avraham. Eliezer was "his servant, the elder of his house, who ruled over all that he had." Avraham trusted Eliezer with all his possessions and left all his business affairs to his management. But in matters involving religious observance, such as finding a suitable wife for Yitzchak, Avraham did not trust Eliezer unquestioningly but insisted that he swear a solemn oath before going on his mission.

NON-HEREDITARY

Avnei Nezer

"...that you shall not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites." (24:3)

Avraham's own family had been idol worshippers. What, then, made them better than the Canaanites?

The Canaanite tribes were morally corrupt - the Torah contains many references to the "abominations of the land of Canaan" - and moral corruption can be passed on from parent to child. Avraham's relatives, on the other hand, were not morally corrupt; they were merely victims of error in that they worshipped teraphim, and error is not inherited.

INNATE KINDNESS

Reb Leibele Eiger

"...that you shall not take a wife for my son from among the daughters of the Canaanites." (24:3)

Avraham Avinu made his servant Eliezer swear: "Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of Canaan, in which I reside." The words "asher anochi yosheiv b'kirbo" (in which I reside) have a dual meaning. Avraham was saying, "I reside within my son Yitzchak (b'kirbo). My character trait of chessed is embedded inside him. I am a part of him, and therefore it is inappropriate to bring him a Canaanite woman who does not have this trait as a wife."

MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Avraham told Eliezer,] 'You must go to my land, to my family, and take a wife for my son, Yitzchak.'" (24:4)

The prophets often describe the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people as that of husband and wife. In this sense, we are all entrusted with a mission comparable to the one that Avraham gave Eliezer - to go out and find those souls that have drifted away and bring them back to G-d, their "husband." (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 104-105)

COMMITTED TO MODESTY

Belzer Rebbe

"The servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, with all his master's wealth in his hand." (24:10)

When Eliezer came to Aram Naharayim to find a bride for his master's son, Yitzchak, he brought jewelry and clothing for the future bride. How did he know what size clothing to bring? After all, Rivkah was only three years old at the time! In fact, Eliezer didn't bring clothing to wear, but a sample of the modest clothing that women wore in Avraham's household. Rivkah saw them and agreed to become part of such a family.

CONTINUOUS PARENTHOOD

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The servant took ten of his master's camels and set out, with all his master's wealth in his hand." (24:10)

Although Yitzchak was already forty years old at the time, Avraham nevertheless went unhesitatingly to all extremes for his son's benefit, for he knew that his role and responsibility as a parent never ends.

Indeed, there is no age limit to the parent-child bond. The unique, spiritual connection between parents and children enables fathers and mothers to remain positive forces in their children's lives forever.

Of course, part of our job as parents is to teach our children to take responsibility for their own lives. But even then, as parents, we remain obligated to be involved, guiding and helping them in their journey through life. (Hitva'aduyot 5730, vol. 1, pp. 292-294)

KEEP PUSHING FORWARD

Rabbi Dovid Gurwitz

"He [Eliezer] made the camels kneel down by the well outside the city, at evening time, the time when women come out to draw water." (24:11)

We say - and hear - the expression "Bracha and Hatzlacha" quite often and might not stop to consider what it really means. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch zt'l teaches us to think quite differently about these words in his drushes in Parshas Chayei Sarah. We see these in the incident of Eliezer's camels kneeling down - Vayabreich - to drink when it was time for the women of the town to draw water, and then, after Rivkah watered the camels, when Eliezer wondered whether Hashem had made his journey successful - Hahitzliach - or not.

Let's look at what Rav Hirsch says about these two words, and let's explore the similarities.

The word Vayabreich connects to the word Berech, the knee joint, in which the power and forces for moving forward are concentrated. Therefore, there is a connection to Beirach - to bless - and a connection to Bericha, which is a gathering of water.

The word Hahitzliach connects to Tzelach, which relates to Shelach, meaning to set in motion. He points out something quite fascinating here - that the sound of the letter Tzadi introduces the subtle idea of overcoming difficulties. (This supports what Mishlei says, that a Tzaddik falls seven times, but keeps rising!) Therefore, Tzelach means to attain a goal by overcoming all the opposing difficulties! Hatzliach means, therefore, to make something successfully achieve its purpose, despite the obstacles.

Rav Hirsch does not end there. He describes the word Selach, as follows: a sinner should be frustrated in his moving forward, and allowing him to progress, and giving him progress is called Selach!

Now we see what the words “Bracha and Hatzlacha” share, according to Rav Hirsch - the idea of overcoming, pushing forward, powerfully advancing - all positive.

FOUNDATION OF KINDNESS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Be present before me today and act kindly with my master; Avraham.” (24:12)

Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, was dispatched to find a suitable mate for Yitzchak. He beseeched Hashem to make his mission successful and devised a test whereby he would ask the maidens who had come to water their flocks to give him a drink. The maiden who would offer water not only for him, but for his camels as well, would be the one designated by Hashem to be Yitzchak's wife.

Rivkah was the daughter of a wicked man and the sister of a wicked man, and she had been reared in an atmosphere of wickedness and idol worship. Yet Eliezer made no attempt to try and discover whether she possessed even a minimal awareness of the true G-d. How could he have turned a blind eye to this facet of her life? Why wasn't he concerned about how she would respond to a diametrically opposite existence in the home of the Avos?

Rav Yehudah Zev Segal zt'l, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, explains: Eliezer was concerned with uncovering one all-important fact: How strong was the girl's attribute of chessed? A person's middos, more than anything else, determine how dedicated he will be to Hashem and His mitzvos. Rivkah, with her magnanimous efforts on a stranger's behalf, demonstrated the fine quality of her middos. Additionally, she responded to Eliezer's request with zerizus (zeal). To Eliezer, there was no doubt that this young girl was a fitting receptacle for the lofty teachings of Avraham. If her lowly upbringing had deprived her of the opportunity to attain yiras Shamayim, she certainly had the potential for it. Attaining yiras Shamayim is a minor achievement compared to developing superlative middos, which Rivkah had clearly accomplished.

Dovid Hamelech teaches us in Tehillim (89:3): Olam chessed yibaneh - “The world is built upon kindness.” In the times of Noach, when the world was devoid of loving-kindness, Hashem destroyed it and began all over again. He saved Noach and his family and gave him an intensive seminar on how to “give unconditionally” in the ark, where he was busy around the clock caring for the animals. In order for the world to begin again, it would have to be done on the foundation of kindness.

For this reason, Eliezer looked for the trait of chessed. He knew that his choice of a wife for Yitzchak would be planting the seeds for all future generations of Jews. He understood that being worthy of miracles was not enough; embodying the trait that the entire world is built upon, the middah of chessed, is more important. Eliezer was not just looking for a ba'alas chessed, but a person who truly loved to do chessed. (Dargah Yeseirah)

EMULATING HASHEM'S KINDNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[Eliezer prayed,] ‘Let it be that the maiden to whom I will say, ‘Please tilt your pitcher so that I may drink,’ and she replies, ‘Drink, and I will also give water to your camels,’ will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak.’” (24:14)

Since G-d lacks nothing, generosity is the primary way in which He relates to the world. For the same reason, generosity is the natural hallmark of people who feel closely connected to G-d. In contrast, the hallmark of evil is selfishness. No matter how much an evil person possesses, he remains unsatisfied, so he seeks only to take and never to give.

Eliezer therefore sought a woman for Yitzchak who would display kindness. When Rivkah went beyond fulfilling Eliezer's specific request by offering to also water his camels, he understood that she was a G-dly person and thus a fitting match for the son of Avraham.

By demonstrating kindness to others, we too are “matched” with the worthiest partners - whether soulmates, friends, business partners, or callings in life. (Siddur im Dach 92b)

AROUSING KINDNESS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“I will know through her that You have acted kindly with my master.” (24:14)

The reason Eliezer asked for this sign from G-d is as follows: It is a general principle that when a person does a mitzvah, the Divine attribute expressed through the mitzvah is propagated throughout the world. For example, if the mitzvah is an expression of kindness (chessed), its performance arouses kindness throughout the entire world, meaning that everyone wants to do chessed. The same applies to all other mitzvos. Performing a mitzvah arouses the quality expressed by that mitzvah throughout the world.

Now, Avraham performed all his mitzvos as an expression of kindness, and he thereby aroused kindness throughout the world, making everyone want to demonstrate kindness toward one another. Now, although Rivkah was really quite young [too young to have taken the initiative to be so kind to Eliezer] she nevertheless performed an act of kindness here. This was possible only because Avraham had aroused kindness in all humanity.

This is why Eliezer prayed, “I will know through her that You have acted kindly,” meaning that the kindness that she is performing comes from You, not from her own good manners. “And,” Eliezer continued, “who is the only one who could have caused this kindness? It can only have been caused from her connection with my master,” meaning, “My master, by performing acts of kindness, aroused this kindness within her.”

[Eliezer asked G-d that the girl destined for Yitzchak exhibit kindness out of proportion to what she would normally be expected to exhibit. This would indicate clearly that her kindness resulted from her spiritual connection to Avraham, rather than from her own good manners. This, in turn, would mean that she was suitable to marry into Avraham's family.]

KIND AND WISE

Bais HaLevi

"[Eliezer prayed,] 'Let it be that the maiden to whom I will say, 'Please tilt your pitcher so that I may drink,' and she replies, 'Drink, and I will also give water to your camels,' will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak.'" (24:14)

Eliezer wanted to test the young woman to see not only whether she had good qualities but also whether she would use her virtues with wisdom and understanding.

Accordingly, he asked her to give him a drink of water from the pitcher with which the water was drawn up from the well. What, he wondered, would she do with the water remaining in the pitcher after he had drunk from it?

If she were to take it home, she would be acting unwisely, for it should occur to her that he might be sick and had therefore contaminated the water with some disease, rendering it unsafe for others to drink from. Alternatively, if she poured the water out, it would be an insult to the stranger and would show that she lacked tact.

The only proper course for her to follow would be to say, "Drink, and I will give your camels to drink also." In this manner, the stranger wouldn't be insulted, nor would other people be exposed to danger by drinking possibly contaminated water. If she chose that alternative, it would be proof that she had not only good qualities but also sufficient intelligence to make the right decisions in unforeseen situations.

And that is indeed what happened.

Rivkah said: "I will draw for your camels also, until they have done drinking" (Bereishis 24:19) - do not think that I will pour the remaining water into the trough for the camels just in order not to deal you an insult. I really want the camels to have water. See, I will draw another pitcher for them to make sure that they will have enough to drink.

Thus, Rivkah performed an additional good deed in order to disguise her intention not to insult Eliezer.

GREATER EFFORT = GREATER REWARD

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"She [Rivkah] went down to the spring, filled her jug and went up." (24:16)

The Midrash understands that since the verse I does not mention that Rivkah "drew" water from the well, only that she "filled her jug," the water must have miraculously

risen to her, thereby not requiring her to actually draw the water (Bereishis Rabbah 60:5, with the Ramban, Bereishis 24:17).

However, when Rivkah offered water to Eliezer and his entourage, we do find that she had to "draw the water" - a mammoth task considering that she provided water for Eliezer and at least ten camels (24:20)! Surely, if Rivkah was initially worthy of water miraculously rising to her, she should have been even more worthy of such a miracle after offering to perform such a tremendous act of kindness?

The Kedushas Levi answers that Rivkah was always worthy of having water rise for her. However, once she decided to perform a mitzvah, Hashem removed the miracle so that she could gain even more reward by exerting greater effort in the mitzvah.

Thus, despite the enormous difficulty she faced, the reward she received was infinitely greater and well worth the effort. (In Pirkei Avos (5:22), this principle is termed "According to the effort is the reward.")

Our exertion for mitzvos has tremendous value in Hashem's eyes. For this reason, He will often send us hardships to enable us to achieve more quality results and thus gain greater reward.

In fact, when it comes to learning Torah in difficult circumstances, Avos D'Rebbe Nosson says that the reward is one hundred times greater than learning undisturbed! (The Chofetz Chaim (Hilchos Issurei Loshon Harah 1:7) expands the principle to include every struggle that one has when trying to serve Hashem.)

This teaching was the basis for the Chofetz Chaim's words of encouragement to a student who was going through a particularly difficult time.

"Tell me," said the Chofetz Chaim, "how many pages of Gemara have you learned so far in this yeshivah?"

Looking down, the student sheepishly answered, "Three."

"Three hundred!" responded the Chofetz Chaim with pride and joy.

"Erm, no Rebbe, just three!" the boy responded, thinking that the Chofetz Chaim had misheard him.

"No my son," said the Chofetz Chaim, taking the boy's hands in his. "We're told that learning through hardship is worth a hundred times more than learning without. And no one here has suffered more hardship than you. So, although you may have only learned three actual pages, its real worth is three hundred pages!"

We see from here that when challenges arise, we should not feel rejected. Quite the opposite in fact. Challenges come in order to better us and show us how much Hashem believes we can achieve (Sefer HaYashar, Shaar 9, 135). And although we must never ask for them (Sanhedrin 107a), when we encounter obstacles, we should not consider them as a means of rejection, but rather, as an opportunity to become greater.

JUST FOR A FEW BUCKS

The Alter of Navaradok

"[Lavan said to Eliezer,] 'Come in... for I have cleared the house.'" (24:31)

He means, "I have cleared the house of idols." (Rashi)

Lavan said to Eliezer: "I have even thrown out my own idols in order to get my hands on some money from your master in return for the hand of my sister Rivkah" (Rashi on pasuk 29).

This is how people like Lavan act. For a few coins of gold, they are willing to give away even their gods.

DUG HIS OWN GRAVE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"I will not eat until I have spoken my words." (24:33)

It appears quite simply that the reason why Eliezer did not want to eat before speaking his piece was because Eliezer certainly understood that these people were wicked. He undoubtedly suspected that they would attempt to kill him by poisoning his food, which was indeed the case. [According to the Midrash (Lekach Tov 24:33) Besuel opposed the match, and plotted to kill Eliezer by poisoning his food.]

For this reason Eliezer said, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." His intention was that the meal be served only after he concluded his words, which were words of Torah.

As our Sages say, "The conversation of the Avos' servants is more cherished by G-d than the words of Torah uttered by the Avos' descendants."

This way he would be protected from danger in the merit of the words of Torah that he said prior to the meal.

And that is in fact what transpired. An angel came and exchanged Eliezer's poisoned plate with the plate of Besuel, and Besuel "fell into the pit that he had dug" for Eliezer, i.e., he died from the poison.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Nesivei Emes

"[Eliezer began his speech,] saying, 'I am Avraham's servant.'" (24:34)

As long as Eliezer felt that he was in charge of finding a wife for Yitzchak, he had his doubts and resorted to a "test" to ensure his success. But the moment that he recognized that he was simply a messenger of his master, the great Avraham Avinu, he instantly felt confident that Hashem was leading him in the right direction.

When we act in the public's interest, we must not think that it is our own abilities that bring us success, for this leaves us in doubt. Rather, we must recognize that it is due to the merit of the tzibbur, that we will be successful.

SELFLESS DEVOTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Eliezer began his speech,] saying, 'I am Avraham's servant.'" (24:34)

The Torah is generally quite terse, even when conveying its most crucial laws. We must study the text very closely even just to understand it properly, and all the more so if we want to uncover its underlying, infinite levels of meaning.

Yet the Torah is strikingly detailed in narrating Eliezer's mission, first relating the episode at length and then recounting Eliezer's repetition of the events to Rivkah's family (see Rashi on Bereishis 24:42).

This is so because the Torah wishes to impress us with Eliezer's selfless commitment and devotion in carrying out his master Avraham's mission, even identifying himself not by name but simply as Avraham's servant. Eliezer's example of selflessness is meant to be the foundation of our own spiritual lives.

This selflessness enables us to approach the Torah unencumbered by preconceived notions and biases, and even allows us to rise above the finite nature of our human intellect. Thus, selflessness is the prerequisite to grasping the infinite meanings latent in all the Torah's laws. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, p. 37)

HASHEM SPARES NOTHING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Eliezer said to Rivkah's family,] 'My master's wife Sarah bore my master a son after she had grown old, and he gave [his son, Yitzchak,] all that he owned.'" (24:36)

Avraham was willing to give up his entire fortune in order to ensure that Yitzchak marry Rivkah. So, too, G-d is willing to give up "all His bounty" to help each and every one of us fulfill our mission of bringing about the "marriage" of the physical and the spiritual dimensions of reality by transforming the world into G-d's home through our good deeds. (Sefer HaSichot 5752, vol. 1, p. 109)

WANTING WHAT HASHEM WANTS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me?'" (24:39)

In the above verse, Eliezer is retelling what occurred in his mission to find a wife for Yitzchak. Specifically, Eliezer relates his worry that the woman he would find would not agree to the marriage. Rashi notes that the word "perhaps" is written without the letter vav - אולי (instead of אוּלַי) which can also be read as "אלי, to me" - to teach us that although Eliezer was ostensibly searching for a wife for Yitzchak, he had a daughter whom he felt would be a suitable match. By essentially writing "to me," explains Rashi, the Torah is informing us that Eliezer was

in fact hoping that the girl in question would not follow him back to Yitzchak's home, leaving Avraham to turn "to me" for Yitzchak's wife - namely, Eliezer's daughter.

The question arises that the above verse is quoting Eliezer when he was relating what had already transpired after he had been successful in his mission; however, when the Torah previously related what actually happened in real-time, the word "perhaps" is written in full (Bereishis 24:5). If Eliezer had a hidden motive at the time, why did the Torah not bring it to our attention then?

The answer, explains Rav Dessler (Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 2, p. 202), is that at the time, Eliezer did not realize that he secretly hoped that his mission would fail. Hence, the Torah wrote the word in full because Eliezer felt that he was going in earnest. However, once Eliezer was retelling what occurred after Rivkah had agreed to marry Yitzchak, only then - once there was no longer a question that his daughter would be able to marry Yitzchak - did he realize the bias that he had subconsciously held.

Human nature dictates that we are naturally biased in our own favor. To anyone wanting to make an objective decision, therefore, this provides a significant challenge. Consequently, our goal in making decisions should not be what we want but what Hashem wants for us. For only then are we able to look at things with a wider lens and recognize what is really in our best interest.

This message was exemplified when someone approached the Steipler for a blessing to win a din Torah that he had the following day. "I could never give such a blessing!" said the Steipler to the bewildered petitioner, "You think that you deserve to win, but a din Torah is about finding the truth and following the will of Hashem. Imagine if you won the case when the money rightfully belonged to the other person - you would be spending your whole life as a thief! So how could you ever want to "win" a din Torah? The only thing that you can and should pray for is that the judges have clarity in understanding the correct outcome. And nothing more!"

UNBIASED DECISIONS

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"[Eliezer said to Lavan and Besuel] 'And I came this day to the fountain...'" (24:42)

Reb Acha said: The ordinary conversation of the Patriarchs' servants is more pleasing to G-d than even the Torah [study] of their children. For the parashah of Eliezer [Avraham's servant] is repeated in the Torah, while many important principles of the Torah are derived only from the indirect indications given in the text. (Midrash Rabbah)

Personal involvement in a situation may tempt one to declare even vermin fit for consumption and to twist the Torah's meaning beyond recognition. The detailed account of conversations of the Patriarchs' servants teaches us how to keep selfish consideration from

influencing our decisions, so that what is impure should remain impure in our eyes regardless of what we gain or lose thereby, just as Eliezer refused to allow his personal desire - that Yitzchak marry his daughter and not Rivkah - interfere with the mission he carried out on behalf of his master Avraham.

IT'S A DONE DEAL

Chernowitzer Rebbe

"They called Rivkah and said to her, 'Will you go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go.'" (24:58)

Rashi comments, "And she said, I will go on my own, even if you do not wish." How is it possible that Rivkah should speak to her parents with arrogance and not in a respectful manner?

In essence, she was saying that her father, Besuel, who did not agree to the match, had died (Rashi on 2:55) and the result was that she would have to go by herself even if people would not permit. Heaven will insist on it, so everyone might as well agree.

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"They blessed Rivkah and said to her, 'Our sister, may you become thousands of myriads...'" (24:60)

We often minimize the small things in life. R' Binyamin Levine shlit'a said: "It's the big things in life that show ability, but it's the small things in life that show quality!" When a person does a "big thing," i.e., organizes a tzedakah event, etc. - it proves that this person has great ability and utilizes it well. But when a person does a "small thing", i.e., gives his neighbor a big smile and "Good morning," holds open the door for the person behind him, this shows the true quality of the person.

When Rivkah gave a thirsty man and his camels some water to drink, her kind yet simple act determined the course of her life as a Matriarch of Klal Yisrael. As Chazal say: - "Man is formed by his actions." One doesn't need to do "great things" in order to become a "great person." Even simple acts of kindness can help one achieve gadlus!

This is how Hashem chose many of our great leaders. He tested them with "small" incidents, factors which depict the true character of the person, before he raised them to a position of greatness. Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid Hamelech were simple shepherds who really were not so "simple" after all. When Hashem saw how they cared for their sheep with such compassion and devotion, He said, "I see how trustworthy you are with your sheep; come and tend to My flock, Klal Yisrael!" This is how Eliezer chose Rivkah; from a simple act of chessed - giving a stranger a drink - she was zocheh to marry Yitzchak Avinu and shape the destiny of the Jewish People.

So the next time you meet a thirsty man with a bunch of camels at an oasis in the desert, offer him a drink... you never know!

SPIRITUAL FIELD TRIP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yitzchak went out to pray in the field toward evening.”
(24:63)

We recite the morning prayer before beginning our workday and the evening prayer after completing our day's activities. In contrast, the afternoon prayer requires us to stop in the midst of our mundane affairs and focus on G-d.

Our daily, mundane affairs are symbolized by “the field,” the area outside the city limits, which is untamed and uncultivated. Through praying in the afternoon, Yitzchak transformed “the field” into a place of prayer to G-d.

The morning prayer undeniably serves as our principal daily renewal of Divine consciousness. Nonetheless, afterward, it remains to be seen how we will fare when we go out into “the field.” Will the secular and material influences of “the field” cause us to lose the spiritual awareness and closeness to G-d that we achieved during the morning prayer? By pausing in the middle of our mundane affairs in order to recite the afternoon prayer, we demonstrate that our involvement in material affairs does not separate us from G-d. (Hitva'aduyot 5715, vol. 2, p. 135; HaYom Yom, 22 Adar I; Igrot Kodesh, vol. 4, pp. 182-183)

JOYFUL SUBMISSION

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Yitzchak went out to pray in the field toward evening.”
(24:63)

In general, submission before another person leads to sadness, because the person who submits to someone else is thwarted from fulfilling his own will and desires on account of the submission that he evinces toward his associate.

This is true only with regard to submission before another human being. However, when a person worships G-d and therefore submits himself to G-d, he is thereby attached to the source of happiness, so he is consequently filled with joy and happiness.

This idea is alluded to in the verse “Yitzchak went forth to pray in the field.” The words “Yitzchak went forth” can be interpreted as a question, i.e., “When will true joy come forth?” for the name “Yitzchak” means happiness (Rashi on Bereishis 17:19).

Continuing with the verse, the word for “to pray” (לשוח) can be interpreted to mean “submission.”

“In the field” means “in holiness” (Zohar 1:157b).

The verse thus reads, “Happiness goes forth [i.e., is revealed] when one's submission is to [G-d, the source of] holiness.

Thus, when we submit to what is holy, the result is joy and happiness.

ONE WITH NATURE

Rebbe Nachman

“Yitzchak went out to pray in the field toward evening.”
(24:63)

It is propitious to pray in fields surrounded by nature. Then all of the grasses and other forces of nature, which continuously sing G-d's praises, lend their strength to one's prayers. (See Likutey Moharan II, 1:11)

BREAK TO PRAY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Yitzchak went out to pray in the field toward evening.”
(24:63)

The Gemara (Brachos 26b) tells us: Yitzchak instituted Tefillah Minchah, as it says, Yitzchak went out to converse in the field in the early evening, and “converse” refers to prayer. The Chida, Chacham Rabbeinu Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai zt'l (Midbar K'demos), writes that although Yitzchak instituted the prayer of Minchah, he was not the first person to recite the afternoon prayer. Adam HaRishon was created in the afternoon on the sixth day of Creation just before Shabbos, and it was at this time that he uttered the first prayer. This is the reason why one must be especially careful to daven Minchah every day.

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l explains that the tefillah of Minchah is referred to as “tefillah hefsek” (prayer of interruption). Each afternoon, amidst our many mundane activities, hectic schedules and social or financial obligations, we must stop, discontinue our affairs and retreat to daven Minchah. To interrupt business activities in order to make time for Minchah is indeed a tremendous mitzvah and a sign of deep commitment to Hashem and His Torah.

In fact, when a Jew interrupts his activities to pray, he is emulating Adam HaRishon. Rashi tells us (Bereishis 2:5) that the first prayer that Adam uttered was for rain, for without it nothing can grow and there will be no food. It follows that just as Adam prayed in the afternoon to bring sustenance to the world, when one davens Minchah in the midst of his daily activities he brings success, sustenance and prosperity to himself and to his family.

UNBURDEN YOURSELF

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

“Yitzchak went out to pray in the field toward evening.”
(24:63)

In this week's parshah we learn what davening is all about. The word used for davening is לשוח, to speak. The Chofetz Chaim (Likutei Amarim, Ch. 10) writes: This is what davening really is - sharing your troubles with Hashem! Tell Him your concerns, pour out your heart to Him! This is the true purpose of tefillah, says the Chofetz Chaim. Like the pasuk says, לשוח בשדה - speak to Hashem.

We've gotten used to three daily tefillos and they lack real passion and feeling. But when a person really speaks to Hashem, he expresses himself from the depths of his heart.

The Alshich HaKadosh says, 'תפילה לעני כי יעטף ולפני ה' ישפוך שיחו ("A prayer for the poor that he will wrap himself up and pour out his conversation before Hashem") - When a person is in pain, he should express it by pouring out his heart to Hashem.

When you share your pain with a friend, you feel a lot better. Do the same with Hashem! Just like you pour water out from a vessel, pour out all of your troubles to Hashem and you will feel so much lighter.

This is what davening is really about, says the Chofetz Chaim. This is what true tefillah means. Unburdening yourself to Hashem.

SOURCE OF LIGHT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak brought Rivkah into the tent of his mother Sarah." (24:67)

Although Avraham lit the Sabbath candles after Sarah's passing (for he observed all the Torah's commandments), his candles did not remain lit throughout the week, as Sarah's had. But when Rivkah began kindling the Sabbath lights, her candles continued to burn miraculously the whole week.

This demonstrates the unique ability of Jewish women and girls - who are all "daughters" of Sarah and Rivkah - to influence the spiritual character of the home, illuminating it with the holiness of the Sabbath throughout the ensuing mundane week. Although the illumination provided by their candles might be physically visible for only a limited time, their spiritual illumination continues throughout the entire week.

BRINGING JOY TO HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Avraham remarried [Hagar,] the woman who was [now also] named Keturah." (25:1)

Hagar was renamed Keturah (which means "incense") because, having permanently renounced idolatry, her deeds were now as pleasing to G-d as incense (see Rashi).

One of the ingredients of the incense that was offered up in the holy Temple was musk, which was derived from the blood of a non-kosher animal (Mishneh Torah, Kelei HaMikdash 1:3). This demonstrates the incense's unique capability to elevate even entities on the lowest rung of spirituality to the heights of holiness. Hagar/Keturah is therefore compared to the incense, because her return to Avraham and the path of truth after having lapsed into idolatry mirrors this unique characteristic of the Temple's incense.

From this we learn how great is the pleasure we can give G-d by returning to Him after any lapse in our own behavior. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 174-179)

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Avraham's] sons, Yitzchak and Yishmael, buried him in the Machpeilah Cave." (25:9)

Yitzchak is mentioned first, indicating that although Yishmael was the elder son, he allowed Yitzchak to lead the funeral. Yishmael thus demonstrated that he had truly repented: His primary sin had been his claim to Yitzchak's inheritance; it was only after Avraham died that Yishmael could have made this claim, yet he did not.

Sarah deserves the credit for Yishmael's improvement of character. Her insistence on directing Yishmael properly eventually led him to repent enough to recognize the truth of Yitzchak's primacy. Following Sarah's example, we too should not give up or shy away from correcting and assisting those who truly need our help in the ongoing challenge of self-refinement. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 149-150)

TRANSFORMING LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yishmael] dwelled throughout the area [settled by] all his descendants." (25:28)

Literally, the Hebrew original reads: "He fell throughout the area..." Yishmael was the "fallen" version of Avraham. Avraham personified holy love - love for G-d and kindness to others. Yishmael personified love in its "fallen" version, an obsessive desire for physicality and sensuality.

In our own lives, it is our task to transform our love and passion for material things - the fallen love of Yishmael - into a holy love for G-d. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5648, p. 196)

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