



# Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

## FLATTENING OUR EGO

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KAYLA BENSMIHEN ('19)

YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)

SARA DEICHMAN ('19)

YOSEF SCHER ('21)

This week's parsha includes several events that, on the surface, seem to only be related due to their chronology. However, we must investigate whether a deeper connection exists between Avraham's negotiation of ac-

quiring a burial plot for his wife and the detailed accounting of arranging a shidduch for his son. What might this connection teach us about navigating successful relationships in our own lives?

This year our sophomores are learning Masechet Kiddushin, which opens with a discussion of how a man and woman initiate the marriage process:

“האשה נקנית בשלש דרכים”

“a woman is betrothed in 3 ways,” where the first method of קניין involves a man giving a woman either money (at least a prutah -- the most minimal coin of halachic signif-

icance) or an object worth at least a prutah.

After asking how we know that money is allowed for the betrothal of a woman, the gemara answers:

גמר “קייחה” “קייחה” משדה עפרון. כתיב הכא: “כי יקח איש אשה” (דברים כב, יג), וכתיב התם: “נתתי כסף השדה קח ממני” (בראשית כג)

The gemara utilizes a גזירה שוה, a method of Torah exegesis using the textual similarity of the word יקח in the pasuk describing the process of a man marrying a woman to the word קח (“to acquire”) in the story of the acquisition of the field of Ephron. Given this, and given that Avraham procured the field of Ephron with money, we learn that a man must give a woman money in order to betroth her.

Is it just a coincidence that in this week's parsha we find both the first mention of a man (Yitzchak) marrying a woman (Rivkah) (using the same language as the more general pasuk mentioned in Parshat Devarim) and the story of the acquisition of the field of Ephron (the exact wording of which is needed in order to justify the use of money in order to enact kiddushin-marriage)

“ויביאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו ויקח רבקה ותהי לו לאשה” (24:67)?

And what if Avraham had accepted Ephron's generosity in acquiring his field for free? Not only would the gemara not be able to use the above גזירה שוה, but we would also lose the valuable life lesson that, for a marriage to last, both the chatan and kallah must believe that they are getting the better end of the deal in feeling that each is fortunate to be marrying "up" (just as both Avraham and Ephron felt in their exchange).

Lastly, nothing in the Torah is written by accident, and this even includes the name of the land owner! The root of the name of עפרון is עפר (dust/dirt), which indicates the concept of bitul (self-nullification; e.g., we nullify chametz on Erev Pesach by declaring it as ownerless as the dust of the earth). Chassidut, the inner dimension of Torah, comes to reveal that hidden away in this standard usage of a גזירה שוה, combined with these well-known stories in the same parsha, is perhaps the most important piece of advice regarding not only a marriage but any relationship: you have to work hard to put someone else's needs ahead of your own and make an effort to downplay the apparent importance of your own needs in comparison to others.

Most fights occur because a person feels that s/he is being attacked, her/his ego gets hurt, and s/he retaliates. We automatically assume that someone else is out to get us, even at the subconscious level. When we take to heart this deeper message of flattening our ego, we suddenly find that apparent attacks hurt only as much as a flat piece of paper is hurt when it is walked upon. As we saw in last week's parsha, Avraham Avinu epitomized the quality of bitul, as he placed his relationships with others, especially with God, ahead of his own needs and desires. We should merit to achieve success in our own efforts to learn from this parsha, and from the example of Avraham Avinu, of the importance of working on the middah of bitul, for with this refinement will we find improvement in all of our relationships.

## THE GOOD LIFE

KAYLA BENSMIHEN ('19)

In this week's parsha, Chayei Sarah, we hear about Sarah's life. Rashi points out that the Torah repeats the phrase "the years of Sarah's life" to help emphasize how great Sarah's life was. How can we say Sarah's life was always great? In class, we've learned about her troubles having children, being held captive by Pharaoh, giving of Avraham to Hagar, and the stress that Akeidat Yitzchak caused her. What was so great about her situation? Why emphasize a life that seems

so full of hardship?

The gemara (Taanit 21a) introduces the concept of "gam zu letovah," the belief that everything happens for the good. The gemara tells the story of a Tanna by the name of Nachum. Nachum's most famous line was "gam zu letovah" -- no matter what would happen to him, even bad, he would say that line. One day Nachum was going to bring jewels to the king and, the night before, his jewels were stolen. He approached the king with nothing but sand. The king got so mad that he wanted to kill all of the Jewish people. Eliyahu HaNavi transformed into the role of a royal advisor. He told the king that the sand Nachum brought was the same sand Avraham Avinu used in the war against the kings. The king was so amazed and sent Nachum off with jewels. A situation that could have turned bad ultimately did not.

It's easier said than done, but all you have to do is look for the good in every situation because you never know how it will turn out. This was how Sarah lived her life, there were bits and pieces that were hard, but overall her life was good. Rashi emphasizes Sarah's good life by pointing out the positive aspects that she focused on, like finally having the child she had prayed for.

## ELIEZER'S PROMISE

YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)

Following Sarah Imeinu's death at the beginning of this week's parsha, we meet Eliezer. He was Avraham's longest-employed servant and was tasked with finding Yitzchak a wife.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבִרְהָם, אֶל-עֲבָדוֹ זֶקֶן בֵּיתוֹ, הַמְשֵׁל, בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ  
שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ, תַּחַת יָרְכִי

And Avraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, "Put your hand under my thigh" (Bereishit 24:2).

The pasuk shows that Avraham had a lot of trust in Eliezer his servant, but what does Avraham mean by telling Eliezer to "put his hand under his thigh"?

According to Rashi, this strange request refers to the fact that when someone takes an oath, they must have an article related to a mitzvah, such as a Torah or tefillin with them. Since circumcision was Avraham's first mitzvah, and he did it with love, he asked Eliezer to put his hand under Avraham's thigh.

The Ibn Ezra comments that in those days, servants used to place their hands under the hip of their master as a sign of obedience. The master, by sitting on the servant's hand, signaled the fact that the servant had to do his job. However, Avraham wanted Eliezer to promise two things: first to take an oath to be a faithful servant to Avraham, then an additional oath to be a faithful servant to Hashem, the Master of all heaven and earth.

From this idea, although we may feel like "servants" whether it be to our parents, employers, or teachers, we are all servants of Hashem. By remembering our promise to Him, through a brit or tefillin, we are reminded of how we are Hashem's special and chosen nation.

## ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY SEVEN YEARS

SARA DEICHMAN ('19)

A record of the years of Sarah's life begins this week's parsha. The Torah states (23:1): "The years of her lifetime," followed by the statement that these were: "the years of her life." The repetition of the phrasing begs the question: what is the reason for this repetitive and seemingly awkward sentence?

Rashi asserts that the interesting phrasing alludes to the fact that all of her years were equally devoid of sin. But how can we, regular people, attempt to live each year of our lives free of sin, like Sarah, if we have already sinned last year and the year before?

We must understand that while God expects us to follow our Imahot and Avot, we are simply not at the same level they were. However, we are taught that the act of teshuva can eliminate our past sins when done out of pure love. One should never think, "I have already sinned; there is nothing I can do." We must show our love of God by completing teshuva, and only then will we have full control of the course of our lives, and in that way, emulate Sarah.

Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik further comments on the phrasing, noting that an individual experiences many stages of life. After one completes one stage,

it is sealed. There is no chance for edification in the realm of that one time period. However, Chazal explain that no matter how old Sarah was, she retained characteristics from every stage. When Sarah was 20, she kept the curiosity of a 7 year old. Just as a 7 year old has a pure view of God, Sarah retained her wholesome image of our creator. When Sarah had the wisdom and experience of a 100 year old, she still had the desire to learn of a 20 year old. Therefore, the Torah tells us each of the numbers, "seventy," "twenty," and "one-hundred" separately, instead of saying 127. May we all live like our Ima and set the course of our lives in a truly positive way. We should all retain the messages each stage of life presents us with, and remember that it's never too late to do teshuva!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD MIDDOT

YOSEF SCHER ('21)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Chayei Sarah, Avraham gives his loyal servant, Eliezer, the task of finding a wife for his son, Yitzchak. Eliezer travels long and far in order to find the perfect girl for Yitzchak. After a tiring journey, Eliezer meets a beautiful, young girl who meets the requirement of his "test," making her the perfect wife for Yitzchak.

One could ask a very simple but critical question on Avraham's decision to make his servant look for a wife for his son: Why did Avraham make Eliezer travel and look for a wife for Yitzchak in the first place? At the time, Avraham and Yitzchak were the only people who were faithful to Hashem! Whomever Eliezer found, she would be a girl who came from an idol-worshipping family. What difference did it then make where she came from?

Rabbi Yeshaya Greenberger gives an excellent answer to this question. While it is true that there weren't any "Torah-observant" girls for Yitzchak to marry, Avraham sent Eliezer to look for a wife who would have good middot and character traits. Before Eliezer found Rivkah, he made a pact with Hashem. Eliezer would stand by the well and would ask the girls to give him some water. If the girl would not only offer water to Eliezer, but also to his ten camels, it would be a sign from Hashem that she was the girl for Yitzchak. Think about Eliezer's deal with Hashem for a moment. He was asking for a young woman to draw

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water not only for him, but also for his ten camels in the hot, sandy desert. In addition to this, these camels would most likely not be satisfied after just one bowl of water, they would probably want at least three to five bowls of water; camels can store huge amounts of water after drinking in one sitting. How could Eliezer possibly expect anyone to complete the task?

Eliezer wasn't just looking for any ordinary young girl, he was looking for the best one for his master's son. He was looking for a person with extraordinary middot, someone who was above and beyond, so that there would be no question that she was "the one." Only someone like this would be an appropriate match for Yitzchak's spiritual level.

But why was it so important for this girl to have middot? Of course, a person should always have good middot, but why were they so specifically important to Avraham? To answer this question we can consider a brief mashal (story): An art teacher assigned his students their final project of the year. They had to create an statue of the teacher in five minutes with the materials of their choosing. If the students completed this task, they would pass the course. If the students didn't complete the task, then they would fail the course. The first student approached the teacher and, after five minutes, he completed his statute. His statute had the exact clothes of the teacher but didn't actually look like him. The teacher decided to fail him. The next student approached the teacher and after five minutes, he finished his statue. His statue was very messy and did not look anything like the teacher. The teacher failed him. The final student approached the teacher, but unlike the previous students, he instructed his teacher not to move a muscle. He took some plaster and molded onto the teacher's face. After five minutes, his statue was an exact replica of the teacher. The teacher was pleased with this statute and so he passed the student.

The lesson of the story is an equation: good middot = soft clay. Avraham knew that there were no girls who believed in God and so he had to look for a young woman who would learn how to keep the Torah and be willing to adapt her lifestyle accordingly. Avraham needed to find someone who would be flexible and willing to change. A person with good middot cares for other people and helps them. This person always wants to do the right thing. A person who has good middot is flexible, like soft clay, and is able to learn new things, to adapt.

When Avraham sent Eliezer to search for a young woman for Yitzchak, he was warning him that he shouldn't bring back a girl with bad middot. On the contrary, Avraham told Eliezer that he should only bring back a young woman with good middot who could learn to fit in with his family and eventually become one of the mothers of Bnei Yisrael. May we all merit to have the "flexibility" of Rivkah, so that we can learn and adapt to any new situation we are put in, and eventually thrive.

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