



פרשת חיי שרה
Parshat Chayei Sarah

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RABBI DOVID KIMCHE

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BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

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In the flow of the storyline through Sefer Bereishit, this week's Parsha marks the transition point between Avraham Avinu and his beloved son, Yitzchak. Yitzchak was to take over the mission of his

revered father and continue the charge, building what was going to be a nation who enjoy a special relationship with Hashem.

Yitzchak remains an enigmatic figure in the Torah. Not much is said about him, and we get only a few glimpses into his private life. Most puzzling of all is his very name - Yitzchak. Axiomatic to Jewish language is that names are not arbitrary or surface-level, but rather speak to the essence of the item - be it an object or a person. The name 'Yitzchak' leaves us with a conun-

drum. 'Yitzchak' means laughter, literally 'he will laugh'. If there was anyone in Torah who was further from this description it would be Yitzchak Avinu. His character is one of restraint, discipline, focus; in language of Chazal, *Gevura*-strength. What are we to make of this name, and seeming lack of congruence between the person and his name?

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch provides a majestic explanation. He maintains that yes, the name 'Yizchak', 'laughter' is indeed appropriate - but not describing his personality, rather his role in history. It is true that Yitzchak is not a man whom one would associate with a laughing, joking personality. But, explains Rav Hirsch, perhaps we are looking at laughter on a shallow level. Laughter is merely the surface-level reaction. What causes that reaction is what should interest us. He explains that we laugh when we encounter something unexpected, absurd. (Much of stand-up comedy is crafted revolving around this principle - people laugh when the punch-line is the total opposite of what they were expecting.) And Yitzchak was the ultimate 'unexpected' baby. Both Avraham and Sarah were old people

when they bore this child. There is much significance, continues Rav Hirsch, to the fact that Yitzchak's birth - essentially, his existence - is supernatural, absurd. Hashem informs Avraham that he will bear a son, and he should be called 'Yitzchak' (Bereishit 17:19), *indicating to Avraham that in the same way that Yitzchak's (the very first child of this new nation) very existence makes no sense in the natural order, so too the nation which eventually will come out from him, their existence will be one which is outside the natural order.*

The Jewish people exist and survive beyond natural explanations. We have survived every attempt to wipe us out; we have weathered every storm. We have outlived every despot seeking our destruction. We are alive, and they are consigned to history books and museums. Our survival makes no sense in the natural order of events. We, the Jewish people, are the ultimate absurd - the ultimate 'Yitzchak'.

And so, we look back at the name prescribed by Hashem to Avraham for his son, and see not incongruence but rather a deep and profound message, almost an assurance. Yitzchak's existence is supernatural; so too, the nation which he launches, their existence through time will be supernatural.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Chayei Sarah, Avraham sends his servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for his son, Yitzchak. Eliezer devises a plan to find the perfect girl: The girl who offers his camels water in addition to giving him water is the one for Yitzchak. Eliezer gets to Aram and meets Rivka, who meets all of his requirements. Before even asking her name or about her family, Eliezer gives Rivka presents of jewelry.

Many mefarshim ask why Eliezer chooses to give Rivka gifts before inquiring about her background? Wouldn't it be more logical if Eliezer would find out if Rivka came from a proper home before choosing her to marry Yitzchak?

Rashi explains that later on, when retelling the story of Rivka's kindness to her family, Eliezer says that he first asks Rivka her name and then gives her gifts. The

reason for switching the order of events was to make it seem that Eliezer did not give jewelry to random strangers. However, this assumption was not an issue for Eliezer. He saw Rivka's actions and knew that she was the right one for Yitzchak. It did not matter where she came from or who her parents were because Rivka had incredible middot and would prove to be the best partner for Yitzchak. Eliezer did not need to judge Rivka based on her background because her actions did all the talking.

This parsha teaches us about first impressions. The way we act when first meeting someone impacts the way they view us. Eliezer is impressed by his first interactions with Rivka because of her kindness and therefore, he knows that she is the perfect girl for Yitzchak. We see the same theme with Yitzchak and Rivka. When Rivka gets to Yitzchak's tent, she sees him davening in the field and instantly falls off her camel. The Netziv suggests that Rivka sees how holy Yitzchak is and doubts if she is an appropriate match for him, ultimately setting the tone of their entire marriage. The way Rivka and Yitzchak act when meeting new people demonstrates their true personalities; Yitzchak shows his connection with Hashem, while Rivka exemplifies true chesed.

It is important for us to realize that others' perceptions of us are based off our actions. It is our responsibility to act in a way that shows our best characteristics because our first interactions with people will shape our relationships with them. Actions speak louder than words and have an everlasting impact. We learn from Rivka and Yitzchak that first impressions are essential and defining factors in a relationship.

PRIME REAL ESTATE

YONI KURTZ ('20)

Parshat Chayei Sarah discusses a diverse array of topics and covers many different parts of Avraham's unique life-cycle. One of the most impactful is Avraham's purchase of Maharat Hamachpeila, in Chevron, from Ephron. Avraham makes this purchase to bury his late wife, Sarah. This sort of story does not seem like one that would receive much detail in the Torah. There are many transactions that occur in Tanach, from the sale of Yosef that occurs later in *Bereishit*, Yaakov's purchase of the *bechira* from Eisav, to Da-

vid's purchase of what many commentators believe to be *Har Habayit* at the end of *Shmuel Bet*. In each of these cases, however, there is not much haggling. The purchaser makes clear he wants to buy something, the seller names his price, and the sale occurs. Only in our case here, when Avraham tries to buy a field to bury Sarah in, does the Torah devote fourteen pesukim to the entire process. What is the significance? Why here, as opposed to in the other cases above, do we need the background information around Avraham's real estate purchase. Isn't that for the lawyers to figure out?

The Torah ends Avraham and Ephron's agreement by stating:

וַיִּקַּם שְׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן, אֲשֶׁר בְּמַכְפֶּלֶה, אֲשֶׁר, לְפָנַי
מִמָּרָא הַשְּׂדֵה, וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר-בוֹ, וְכָל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר
בַּשְּׂדֵה, אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-גְּבֻלוֹ סָבִיב: לְאַבְרָהָם לְמִקְנָה,
לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי-חַת, בְּכָל, בְּאֵי שְׁעַר-עִיר

So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession, in the presence of the Hittites, of all who entered the gate of his town (Bereishit 23:17-18)

Several commentators pick up on the strange use of the word **וַיִּקַּם** with reference to the field. The Radak explains simply that **וַיִּקַּם** is used here to show that the purchase of the field was firmly established and had a more permanent nature. This idea works well as an answer to our question above. Perhaps the reason that the Torah chooses to go into such detail here is to stress that this was *not* just a small purchase of a grave. The agreement between Avraham and Efron had a lot more to it; it was a permanent bond between two people that gave Avraham a piece of land that is now one of the holiest places a Jew can visit. Certainly, Efron did not realize the importance of his field at the time, or he would not have offered to give it away for nothing. Avraham, on the other hand, wanted to make a permanent agreement because he understood, at least to some extent, that this land was more than just a random field.

In our lives, we come across lots of random fields, both literal and metaphorical. Though I am not suggesting that you go buy lots of real estate in rural Iowa, I do think that we should think closely about the importance of these seemingly “random” fields. Though we may often think that aspects of our lives

are insignificant and pointless, we should always strive to find the meaning in every moment and situation that we encounter, just as Avraham did when buying *Maharat Hamachpeila*.

DO THE RIGHT THING

LIZI BUGAY ('22)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Chayei Sarah, Avraham begins a search for a wife for Yitzchak, his son, after his wife's burial. He says to his servant:

אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִקַּח אִשָּׁה לְבְנֵי מִבְּנוֹת
הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּקִרְבּוֹ

“That you may not take a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell” (Bereishit 24:3)

Avraham wants to find the best possible wife for his son. Eliezer, who serves as his agent in this endeavor, goes to Aram Naharaim, into the city of Nachor, and finds Rivka. To his surprise, Rivka offers him a drink and even offers to feed the camels. As a result, Eliezer was confident that his mission was successful.

Thereafter, we learn about Rivka's family. Her father is Betuel the son of Milkah, the wife of Nachor who is Avraham's brother. Although related to Avraham, they did not adopt his good traits.

Eliezer gives Rivka gifts, which the Torah lists as bracelets and rings. When Lavan sees Eliezer he runs towards him. Rashi explains that the word **וַיִּרַץ** “and he ran” (Bereishit 24:29) indicates that the reason Lavan runs to Eliezer is because he thought that the servant was wealthy. Apparently Lavan desires the material possessions that Eliezer was holding. Lavan's greed is on full display. Rashi also highlights the fact that Lavan's name in the phrase **וַיַּעַן לָבָן וּבְתוּאֵל**, “then Lavan and Betuel answered” (Bereishit 48:50) appears first because he was a wicked person and sprang up to answer before his father.

In contrast, we learn that Rivka is very different from her family. She is kind and not greedy. When she first meets Eliezer, she offers to give water to 10 camels, a task that is very time consuming because each camel can drink a lot of water. Additionally, Rivka seems to understand the big picture that traveling with Eliezer

will strengthen her Judaism and make her and her lineal descendants great.

One of the lessons of this story, is that we should strive to be like Rivka despite any challenges or obstacles. We should not be influenced by those who seek outlandish material gain. At a young age, Rivka was keenly aware of the measures needed to make her an outstanding person. Like Rivka, we should also accept challenges and opportunities which will make us and our future generations better people.

MAKE THE YEARS COUNT

AVICHAH SHEKHTER ('22)

In Parshat Chayei Sarah, Avraham is described in a unique way:

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בְּיָמָיו - "Now Abraham was old, well on in years" (24:1).

Many commentators are troubled why the Torah uses this double language if the Torah never wastes even one letter. After all, aren't "old" and "well on in years" the same thing? Chacham Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l answers this question with the following story.

A rabbi was visiting a town and the town elders took him on a tour. They showed him the shul, the Mikvah, pizza shop, the kosher supermarket, and the Jewish high school. They also took him to the Jewish cemetery. When looking at the gravestones, he noticed something peculiar. The inscribed names had ages listed after them: Reuven, 14 years old; Shimon, 12 years old; Levi, 13 years old and so on. The rabbi inquired why everybody died so young. Was there a plague? Was there a terrorist attack? The elders told him that nobody died young.

The practice in this town was for every person to record on a notepad how many hours they spent learning Torah and doing mitzvot every day. They would tally up their hours every day, every month, and every year. When they died, the number of hours spent learning and doing mitzvot would be displayed on the gravestone.

With this story in mind, Chacham Rabbi Ovadia Yosef zt"l explains that Avraham not only grew physically old, but he "grew well on in his years" spending the days of his life learning Torah, performing mitzvot, and spreading the word of Hashem. This teaches us to spend our time wisely dedicating most of our days to Godly pursuits. May we all emulate Avraham's willingness and readiness to accomplish the will of Hashem for the rest of our lives.

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