

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHAYEI SARA · 22 CHESHVAN 5771 · OCT. 30, 2010 · VOL. 18 NO. 5

PARSHA INSIGHTS

FAITH AND KINDNESS

“When she finished giving him (Eliezer) to drink, she said, ‘I will draw water even for your camels until they have finished drinking’.” (24:19)

If Orthodox Judaism required you to travel the world eating in all the best *treif* restaurants, a lot more people would be religious.

The ultimate barrier to faith in G-d is not *logical* but *psychological*.

Subconsciously, a person knows that if he accepts that the order in Creation logically implies an ‘Orderer’, this may eventually mean that he is going to have to stop driving to the golf club on Saturday morning. More than that, he’s going to have to stop seeing himself as the center of the universe; having been brought up in the ‘Me’ generation, the thought that the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment may not be the ultimate purpose of life, strikes at the very foundations of our cultural orientation.

How much more comfortable to pay lip service to a Creator who is not interested in me in the slightest; then I can carry on doing exactly as I want!

This is a bribe that most people find irresistible. The desires of the heart blind the intellect and the truth

becomes its first victim. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put it ‘Belief is not the *knowledge* that there is a G-d, but rather the *acknowledgment*.’

When Eliezer tested Rivka as a wife for Yitzchak, he sought only to find out if she had a love of kindness. Why

didn’t he check that she also had the unshakeable faith in G-d that was necessary as the future mother of the Jewish People?

The answer is that kindness and faith are inextricably linked. Only one who is selflessly involved in the needs of others can free himself from the bribes of his own selfish desires. Only one who loves kindness for its own sake has the objectivity to recognize the Creator.

When Eliezer saw that Rivka loved kindness for its own sake — like Avraham — he knew she also had the objectivity needed for true

faith, and that she was fit to be the mother of the Jewish People.

• Sources: Based on Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, *zatzal*, and Rabbi Nota Schiller, *shlita*, and Rabbi Zev Leff, *shlita*

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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty

camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

ISRAEL *Forever*

CLAIMS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

In the days of Alexander the Great's rule over Eretz Yisrael the descendants of Yishmael and Keturah laid claim to a partnership with the other descendants of the Patriarch Avraham. Since they are identified in the Torah as the progeny of Avraham, they argued, they should share the land promised to him.

The refutation of their claim made by the spokesman for Jewry was based on a passage in this week's Torah portion (*Bereishet* 25:25).

"Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak."

This incident is related in the Talmud (*Mesechta Sanhedrin* 91a) alongside a claim made by the Canaanites to the land, a claim which was also soundly refuted.

One cannot help but see in those two false claims a mirror of the arguments today for a "single, democratic state" or "two states for two nations."

Now, as then, these claims will be no more than exercises in futility, as Israel remains only ours forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

BEER-LECHAI-ROI – A SPECIAL WELL

When Avraham's servant Eliezer returned to Eretz Yisrael with a bride for Yitzchak, he encountered him returning from a place in the south called Beer-lechai-roi (Well of the Living One).

Yitzchak went there to pray because that was



where Hagar's prayers had once been answered (*Bereishet* 16:13-14). This well, located between Kadesh and Bered, was also where Hagar now lived and Yitzchak went there to bring her back to his father as a wife after his mother was no longer alive.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand"?
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go"?
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' יצחק אייזיק בן הרה"ח ר' אליעזר דב זצ"ל
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Sacrifice for sin committed by public because of erroneous ruling of the Sanhedrin
- What constitutes the final ruling of the court to make such a sacrifice necessary
- When one of the judges is aware an error is being made
- Responsibility of individual sinning as a result of court's erroneous judgment
- What constitutes a congregation
- The silent judge who dissents
- What sort of erroneous ruling requires a sacrifice as atonement
- How many sacrifices are brought for erroneous judgment
- The status of a single tribe in regard to these sacrifices
- The sacrifices that were brought to atone for the dead
- The sacrifice of the *kohen gadol* who sinned by acting upon his own erroneous judgment

WHAT CONSTITUTES A CONGREGATION

As proof that a single tribe in Israel is considered a *kahal* – a congregation – the *gemara* cites the passage (*Bereishet* 48:4) in which the Patriarch Yaakov relates to his son Yosef the promise made to him by G-d on his way back to Eretz Yisrael from the house of Lavan.

“He said to me, ‘Behold I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make you a congregation of nations’.”

Since only Binyamin was to be born after that promise, the conclusion is that the single tribe emanating from him would also be considered a congregation.

Tosefot raises the question as to why the *gemara* cites this recalling of the promise rather than the promise itself which appears earlier (*Bereishet* 35:11):

“Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of

nations shall descend from you.”

On closer examination we note that there is a subtle difference in the language of the two seemingly similar passages. Rashi cites the Midrash that the “nation” mentioned in the first passage refers to the birth of Binyamin, while the “congregation of nations” refers to the division of the Tribe of Yosef into the two tribes of Menashe and Ephraim. It is this separation between “nation” and “congregation of nations” which teaches us that the single term “congregation of nations” in the second passage is also to be understood as a reference to congregation (Binyamin) and nations (Menashe and Ephraim). Since the second passage is thus dependent on the first as proof that a single tribe constitutes a congregation, the *gemara* found it preferable to cite it as a reference to both.

• *Horiyot* 5b

What the SAGES Say

“When G-d told Moshe that the elders he appointed to the first Sanhedrin should ‘bear the burden of the people with you’ (*Bamidbar* 11:17), it meant that they must be like Moshe devoid of any disqualifying features.”

• Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak - *Horiyot* 4b

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SARAH'S PLOT

From: Mendy

*Dear Rabbi,
I never understood why, since G-d promised and gave the Land of Israel to Abraham, that he had to ask the local inhabitants to sell him the field of Efron for a burial plot for Sarah. I mean, it was really Abraham's anyway, right?*

Dear Mendy,

This is a very good question, and one that is addressed by the Sages of the Talmud.

The fact that Abraham had to plead and negotiate with the Hittites in order to acquire a burial place for Sarah despite having been promised by G-d so many times that He would give him the Land was in fact one of the ten trials with which G-d tested Abraham's faith (Sanhedrin 111a).

Interestingly, given the fact that Abraham knew about the promise and they didn't, he could have been more forthright and forceful about his right to acquire the land. However, we see that despite Abraham's knowledge of the promise, he submitted his request in a most unassuming manner. Thus the Midrash notes: "G-d said to Abraham, 'You humbled yourself before them; I shall make you a lord and prince over them!'"

Where do we see this expressed in the exchange between them?

Abraham says, "I am an alien and resident among you, grant me an estate for a burial site with you that I may bury my dead from before me". The Hittites respond by saying, "Hear us, my lord: You are a prince of G-d in our midst; in the choicest of our burial places bury your dead" (Gen. 23:4).

Notwithstanding Abraham's humility-inspired, Divinely-elicited Hittite homage, presumably Abraham knew of the high regard with which the Hittites held both him and Sarah. In fact, Sarah was so called because she similarly was a 'princess of all mankind' ("Sar" being related to sovereign). So why did he refer to himself as merely an alien and resident? Surely Abraham was not guilty of an obsequious show of humility. So what was he getting at by calling himself an alien resident?

Abraham was expressing the dual role that every Jew in exile must play. On the one hand, he is a physical resident of his country, and must contribute to its welfare. But on the other hand, he should always view himself as a spiritual outsider, for his allegiance to G-d and commitment to the Torah take precedence over anything else. Therefore a Jew must always be prepared to stand alone if the surrounding culture conflicts with his unique responsibility and destiny as a Jew.

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Question: I sometimes find myself virtually deafened by the loud volume of the music being played at weddings and celebrations and amplified to accompany the dancing. I would like to participate in the dancing but I find this noise unbearable. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: There is hardly a point in lodging your complaint

with the orchestra which is simply doing what they have been instructed by the family that hired its services.

Your only recourse is to approach the hirer himself and point out that things can be lively even at a lower volume. You may be surprised that there will be an understanding response which allows you to remain in the hall and join the dancing.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A LUCKY ACCIDENT

When the famed philanthropist Nathan Strauss visited Jerusalem to participate in the *chanukat habayit* dedication of the soup kitchen for needy Jews whose construction he had helped to finance, he was accompanied by his brother who had refused to contribute to this project.

As they left the soup kitchen, Nathan slipped on the stairs and severely sprained his ankle. His brother, who had

only disdain for the hundreds of poor Jews who depended on the kitchen, visited him in the hospital and made a cynical remark about the "reward" Nathan had received from Heaven for his "misguided charity."

Anxious to take care of some business affairs in Europe, the brother departed before Nathan had recuperated. The ship he traveled on sank and he lost his life. Only then did it become clear that Nathan's charity had saved his life.

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