

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת חיי שרה

ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה
“The lifetime of Sarah was one hundred years, twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life” (23:1)

Why does the Torah record the years of Sarah's life in three separate units rather than as one number? The Chasam Sofer answers that as one ages, his enthusiasm progressively wanes. The power of the evil inclination grows with age as well. The Torah tells us that when she was 100, she had the vigor of a twenty-year-old woman. This was Sarah's greatness. She did not retire at the age of 100, but kept on going. The Torah also tells us that when she was 20 years old, she was as much in control of herself as one who is 100. The separation of 20 and 7 teach us that when she was 20, she still had the diligence and the speed of a seven-year-old. She never got lazy or slowed down, she always put the maximum effort into her work. This was a characteristic of the Avos and Imahos, as we see with Rivkah later on in the parsha when she ran to get the water for Eliezer.

Every stage in life comes with its opportunities and challenges. At every step of the way, one should capitalize on the new opportunities that present themselves while coupling them with the lessons he has learned in previous years. As we grow older, we should aim to connect our past successes to the future and maintain what we have gained from the past while reaching for new goals.

ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם בכל
“Now Avraham was old, well on in years. and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything” (24:1)

The Gemara in Yoma 28b cites this posuk as a proof that Avraham was still learning Torah even in his old age. The Maharsha explains that the word זקן can mean both "old" and "a Torah scholar." Since the Torah already said in last week's parsha that Avraham was old forty years earlier, this time the posuk must mean that he was still spending his days learning Torah despite his advanced age.

As a person gets older, his obligation to learn Torah never ends. In fact, when people retire and have more free time, they should make an effort to spend more hours on Torah learning. We should encourage retirees to take advantage of their newfound free time and use it to dedicate more time to Torah, which they could not do when they were working.

The same applies to younger people who are finding themselves with more responsibilities as they grow older. It becomes more difficult to take time out to learn when one has classes, homework and other important tasks to attend to. Nevertheless, the obligation to set aside time to learn never goes away. One should strive to have a set time to learn every day and not allow his Torah study to fall to the wayside as more responsibilities begin to pile up.

ואשבעך בה' אלקי השמים ואלקי הארץ אשר לא תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי יושב בקרב

“And I will have you swear by Hashem, G-d of heaven and G-d of earth, that you not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among who I dwell” (24:3)

The Avnei Nezer asks: Why did Avraham want Yitzchak to marry a girl from his family rather than a Canaanite girl if both worshipped avoda zara? He answers that good character

traits are hereditary and it is more difficult for someone to overcome negative character traits that run in his family. Avoda zara, on the other hand, is a philosophical error and a person can see the light of truth and change his ways. Avraham knew that his family possessed good midos. The Canaanites, however, had bad midos. Even if his family worshipped idols, he knew that they could be brought around to see the truth. He felt that it was most important for his grandchildren to retain the good midos that were in Avraham's family. That is why he sent Eliezer to Charan rather than choose a daughter of Aner, Eshkol or Mamre, Avraham's Emori friends who were his close followers. Even though they believed in Avraham's teachings, they still had the negative character traits of the Canaanite lineage.

ויאמר ה' אלקי אדני אברהם הקרה נא לפני היום ועשה חסד עם אדני אברהם
“And he said: Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, may You so arrange it for me this day that You do kindness with my master Avraham” (24:12)

The word **ויאמר** is read with a "shalsheles" tune, literally, a chain. This indicates that prayer is the chain that provides the continuity of the Jewish people. It is through prayer that we maintain our connection to our Creator. The "shalsheles" also adds emphasis to the prayer of Eliezer out of all the events in the narrative. It is important to see that prayer is effective and that Hashem is always listening to us.

R' Moshe Feinstein is of the opinion (Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 2:25) that even gentiles are obligated to pray at a time of need. This is because such a prayer is an extension of belief in Hashem. If one truly believes in Hashem and His omnipotence, then he will naturally turn to Him when faced with difficult times. Since gentiles are obligated to believe in Hashem as one of the Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach, it follows that they are also required to pray to Him during troublesome times. This idea gives us an insight into the true meaning of tefilla.

והנער טבת מראה מאד בתולה ואיש לא ידעה ותרד העינה ותמלא כדה ותעל
“Now the maiden was very fair to look upon; a virgin, and no man had known her; she descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended” (24:16)

The word **נער** is always written without the **ה** at the end and can be read in the male form. A man is usually the independent member of the household while the woman usually follows her husband's customs and the tone that he sets for the family. By referring to Rivkah in the male form, the Torah indicates that Rivkah broke free of her family and was able to form her own beliefs independent of her family's ideology. Indeed, all of our Avos and Imahos were able to grow and become close to Hashem in hostile environments. We can learn from their examples that we can succeed no matter what kind of situation we are born into. A person cannot allow his surroundings to impede his growth and certainly cannot blame his failures on his environment. While it may be more difficult, a person in such a situation should draw inspiration from our illustrious ancestors and rise above the obstacles in his path to spiritual growth.

ואבא היום אל העין ואמר ה' אלקי אדני אברהם אם ישך נא מצליח דרכי אשר אנכי הלך עליה
“I came today to the spring and said: Hashem, G-d of my master Avraham, if You would graciously make successful the way on which I go” (24:42)

Rashi comments that the conversation of the servants of our patriarchs is more valuable in the eyes of Hashem than the Torah of their children. Many mitzvos are merely hinted to in the Torah through an extra word or letter while Eliezer's account of his encounter with Rivkah is

repeated in its entirety. Why is this so? Rav Meir HaKohen of Warsaw, in his sefer Imrei Kohen, answers that we can learn a lot from the conduct of the Avos and their servants that can bring a person closer to Hashem. Lessons of faith, prayer and a clear manifestation of the hand of Hashem come through in the words of Eliezer. These lessons are worth elaborating on and repeating. There are even different ideas that are brought out in the repetition that are not in the original description.

ותמהר ותורד כדה מעליה ותאמר שתה וגם גמליך אשקה ואשת וגם הגמלים השקתה
“She hurried and lowered her jug from upon herself and said: Drink, and I will even water your camels. So I drank and she watered the camels also” (24:46)

Rivkah gave Eliezer water before she gave the camels to drink. The Magen Avraham cites this posuk as the basis for the halacha that one may drink before giving his animals to drink, even though one must give his animals food before he eats himself. The Torah Temima explains that one only drinks when he is thirsty but sometimes people eat even if they are not hungry. If the person feels the need to drink, then he clearly needs it and the person would take precedence to the animals. However, just because a person wants to eat does not mean that he needs the food and the animals should still come first. Another reason for this difference lies in the fact that eating takes more time than drinking. If one sits down for a meal, it will be a while before the animals get their food. However, a drink will only take a minute and one can then attend to the animals.

Perhaps we can draw a similar conclusion to explain the reason why one may drink unsweetened beverages in the morning before davening but may not eat anything. The main reason for this prohibition is because a person should not spend time on himself before Hashem. A drink is not considered something important that would be considered spending time on oneself. Perhaps, based on the earlier halacha, we can also say that a meal may take longer and sidetrack a person from going to daven while a drink is not a big deal. In any case, just like the Torah Temima's explanation, if a person is in pain, the halacha states that he may eat before davening too. The prohibition against eating before davening should not interfere with a person's concentration during prayer. (See Orach Chayim Siman 89 for more details regarding these halachos)

ויען לבן ובתואל ויאמרו מה' יצא הדבר לא נוכל דבר אליך רע או טוב
“Then Lavan and Besuel answered and said: The matter stemmed from Hashem! We can say to you neither bad nor good” (24:50)

The Sdei Chemed cites that a custom exists that a portion from Parsha Chayei Sarah regarding Yitzchak and Rivka's marriage is read on a Shabbos when a couple is celebrating their Sheva Brochos. The Sukkas Dovid asks: Why would this parsha be read during Sheva Brochos, after the couple is married? Why not read it before marriage so that the unmarried people should know what to look for in a spouse?

The answer is that shidduchim originate directly from Hashem. Even Lavan and Besuel recognized this when they told Eliezer that “the matter stemmed from Hashem.” After getting married, one may wonder what he has gotten himself into. This parsha is read as encouragement to the newly married couple that this shidduch came from Hashem and it is meant to work out if the effort is put into making it work.

Michael Gutmann.....Editor