

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת חיי שרה

ותמת שרה בקרית ארבע הוא חברון בארץ כנען ויבא אברהם לספד לשרה ולבכתה
**“Sarah died in Kiryas Arba which is Chevron in the Land of Canaan;
and Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to bewail her” (23:2)**

The letter כ in the word ולבכתה is written smaller than the other letters in the Sefer Torah. The Baal HaTurim says that the small letter indicates that Avraham did not cry excessively for Sarah because she had lived a long and full life. But why specifically is the letter כ chosen as the small letter? R' Dovid Feinstein cites Rashi who says that when Sarah was 100 years old, she was as free of sin as a person at the age of 20, who only becomes responsible for grave sins at that age. The small letter כ, with its numerical value of 20, symbolizes that it was this trait of Sarah's which caused people to cry after her death. When a person dies, some people cry for the dead but some cry for the living, because the positive influence of the deceased no longer exists. The people cried over the loss of such a sin-free person whose shining example and guidance was now gone forever.

ויקם השדה והמערה אשר בו לאברהם לאחזת קבר מאת בני חת
**“Thus, the field with the its cave was confirmed as Avraham's as an
estate for a burial site, from the children of Ches” (23:20)**

Rashi explains on an earlier posuk that the word ויקם, lit. “and [the field] rose,” means that the field rose in importance, as it used to belong to Efron, a simple person, but now was in the possession of Avraham, an important individual. How does this explanation relate to the repetition of the word ויקם in this posuk? R' Boruch Stein of MTJ suggests that this second “rising,” which was after Sarah was buried, indicates that the field was on an even higher level now because of Sarah's presence.

The lesson that we can learn from this is that there is a certain sanctity that can be brought to a land or even a building. The walls of shuls are said to be imbued with the sanctity of the many prayers that are said within them. We can bring sanctity to our own homes in a way so that our very houses

become infused with holiness. We should work acting in such a way that helps our homes “rise” to a higher level because of our presence in them.

ה' אלקי השמים אשר לקחני מבית אבי ומארץ מולדתי ואשר דבר לי ואשר נשבע לי לאמר לזרעך אתן את הארץ הזאת הוא ישלח מלאכו לפניך ולקחת אשה לבני משם

“Hashem, G-d of the heavens, Who took me from the house of my father and from the land of my birth; Who spoke concerning me, and Who swore to me saying: To your offspring will I give this land – He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there” (24:7)

The Ibn Ezra says that this posuk is a prayer by Avraham that Hashem should guide the servant in his task and help him succeed in bringing back the right wife for Yitzchak. Rabbi Friedman suggests a different explanation. We should recognize that Hashem is always looking out for us and taking care of us. If we do our part, act properly and do the right thing, then Hashem will ensure our success in all our endeavors. Avraham understood that he was doing the right thing by sending his servant on this mission and, because of that, Hashem would assist him. When a person does the right thing, Hashem sends his messengers to help. This statement by Avraham is more than just a prayer. He expresses his confidence and trust in the Divine Providence and his knowledge of the fact that Hashem is watching over everything.

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

Why does the Torah need to tell us about Rivkah’s unsurpassed beauty? R’ Friedman suggests that, if she was so attractive, she needed to be modest to the highest degree in order to avoid the advances of the men around her. This must have been a great challenge for Rivkah. The Torah tells us that, despite the difficulties, she persevered and never compromised her modesty.

Everyone has talents but we often face challenges in those very areas in which we excel. Hashem challenges us to put our skills to a good use. For example, a smart person faces a constant challenge to use his intellect in the right areas. The Torah teaches us to emulate the internal strength of Rivkah. How did she react to her great natural beauty? She remained modest. Her ability to overcome this challenge is the primary source of her greatness.

ותכל להשקתו ותאמר גם לגמליך אשאב עד אם כלו לשתת

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

Why did Rivkah wait to give the servant to drink before saying that she would give the camels to drink too? Furthermore, it seems that, because of this, she should not have passed the servant’s test. After all, he had requested a girl who would say from the very beginning that she would give water to him and his camels!

Rabbi Friedman suggests the following answer. When a host says that he will provide many things, the guest feels very indebted to him from the start. It is difficult to enjoy what the host is doing for him and to ask for more because he knows how much the host is exerting himself on behalf of the guest. On the other hand, if the host does not promise so much, the guest does not feel so indebted and therefore feels more comfortable with enjoying what the host provides at the moment. Making the promises in increments is a greater kindness than to promise everything at once because it allows the guest to fully enjoy everything that is being done on his behalf. This is a higher level of magnanimity than the servant had even hoped for in his prayer.

ויען לבן ובתואל ויאמרו מה? יצא הדבר לא נוכל דבר אליך רע או טוב

“And Lavan and Besuel answered and said: This matter has come from Hashem, we cannot say anything good or bad to you” (24:50)

The S’dei Chemed cites that a custom exists that on a Shabbos Sheva Brachos, a portion from Parsha Chayei Sarah regarding Yitzchak and Rivka’s marriage is read. R’ Dovid Kviat, in his sefer Sukkas Dovid, asks:

Why would this parsha be read during sheva brachos, *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 shiduchim originate directly from Hashem. Even Lavan and Besuel recognized this when they said to Eliezer: “מה' יצא הדבר,” “the matter has come 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 shiduch came from Hashem and it is meant to work if the effort is put into making it work.

(R' Dovid Kviat, a Rosh Yeshiva in the Mir Yeshiva of Brooklyn and a rebbi of Rabbi Friedman who is often quoted in our parsha shiurim, passed away this week. It is our hope that the learning of his teachings should provide an עלייה for his נשמה.)