

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

A Clarity of Lack

"The maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'—let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Yitzchak."

The Gemara in *Yoma* tells us that Eliezer the servant of Avraham was a "zokein v'yosheiv b'yeshiva" – a major Torah scholar. The above prayer tells us also of his incredibly insightful understanding of human nature.

Eliezer was sent on what appeared to be "mission impossible." He was to go back to Charan, to Avraham's family home, to find a wife for Yitzchak. Rivka's brother Lavan was known as "HaArami" which, by switching around the Hebrew letters, reads "HaRamai" or the con man. The midrash further tells us that her father Besuel was also a con man and all the people in their area were con men. How was Eliezer supposed to go Charan of all places to find a wife for Yitzchak who grew up in the ultimate home of *chessed*?

Eliezer's prayer contained a test that he had devised. He would ask the girl to give him to drink and if she responded by offering to give him, plus his camels, then he would know she was the right match for Yitzchak. Rivka passed the test with flying colors. Which only begs the question: How *did* Rivka manage to become a paragon of kindness while growing up completely surrounded by lying con men?

Many years ago, I attended *shalosh seudos* at the Agudah convention where Rav Yochanan Zweig, the Rosh Yeshiva in Miami Beach, asked this very question. He answered it with a truly brilliant observation. Rivka's *chessed* was not a heedless form of *chessed* without thinking about the true needs of the recipient. Rather she looked at

the situation and saw the true need. She saw a traveler that was thirsty. But she also saw that this tired traveler had camels to water – a tiresome task.

This intelligent form of *chessed* shares a very fundamental trait with that of a con man. They both see the weakness or lacking in the other person. The con man sees this need and exploits it. The *baal* or *baaleless chessed* sees the need and fills it.

Eliezer, the quintessential *talmid* of Avraham Avinu, understood why his master was looking for a wife for Yitzchak among his sly and tricky relatives. Avraham, himself the paragon of *chessed*, understood that his ability to see what the other person truly lacked, came from his home and family. He knew that the capacity for *chessed* lay dormant among them, but would blossom in the right person. Eliezer, his ever-faithful servant and disciple, would know how to find it. 🕒

JOIN THE KOLLEL'S EXCITING

Sh'miras Halashon

COUPLES LEARNING PROJECT

Learn Daily Halachos with your spouse

Couples who complete the sefer will receive a \$50 gift card to Kinneret Grill

Starting this Rosh Chodesh Kislev 11/17/20

"NEW!" Monthly Q & A with renowned Sh'miras Halashon expert Rabbi Aharon Sorscher

For more information and to sign up please contact Rabbi Stettin ezrastettin@gmail.com

RABBI DOVID SPETNER



THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

This week's *parasha*:

Q) What does it mean that Sarah was like seven in her beauty? That is the height of a woman's beauty?
A) The *Chizkuni* suggests the way to understand Rashi is as follows. A girl of seven usually uses no makeup, and the beauty is real. Often at twenty, much makeup is used that the face that you see is painted and is not the real face. Rashi is telling us that at twenty with no makeup, Sarah was as beautiful as a girl of seven.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, takes a different approach. He says that the beauty referred to here in Rashi is Sarah's actions. Regarding a girl of seven years, we tend to see only the beauty in the good things she does, for if she does something not so good, we discount it because she is still a child. But when someone is twenty and we are able to say that all her deeds are beautiful, that is something unusual.

It should be noted, however, that the Midrash (quoted at the end of that *Chizkuni*) had a different text than the way it appears in our Rashi, which fits a lot better. "At 100 Sarah was like 20 in beauty and at 20 like 7 in regard to sin." According to this version, there is no question at all.

Last week's *parasha*:

Q) Rashi says that Hashem so to speak asked Avraham to stand up to the test of sacrificing his son in order so that others do not say the first tests were not significant. Really? If you fail once,

➡ CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE ➡

Sponsorship & feedback:

parasha@cincynollel.org

Sponsored l'uy nishmas
Tzvi ben Aron Meir
on his Yartzeit

Cincinnati Torah

is distributed weekly
to local shuls
and the community
e-mail list.

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

CONTINUED

everything you've done until now is out the window?

A) I believe that the answer lies in an important *yesod* (principle) taught to us by the *Vilna Gaon*. In truth, a similar question can be asked on the words of the *malach*, after Avraham almost slaughters his son, “*Ata yadati ki yarei Elokim ata*” (“Now I know that you are a G-d fearing man”). Were the first nine trials not sufficient proof that Avraham possessed *Yiras Shemayim*? The *Gaon* explains that all people have some central point that prompts and gets them going, to the extent that most of their actions revolve around that driving force. It may be money, honor, a sense of fulfillment, peer pressure, etc. Based on this insight into human behavior, one can dispel and play down Avraham's tests by saying “of course he fed anybody who needed, and made it his life's mission to spread the name of Hashem. That was his personality; he was a giver, a person-pleaser.” However, now that he was willing to offer his son on the *mizbeach* (alter) and “take / destroy a life,” that proved retroactively that the *nekudah* (point) that all Avraham's actions revolved around was *Yiras Elokim* (fear of G-d). All of Avraham's actions were driven by “what does Hashem want from me now,” with no ulterior motives. Sometimes

A SHINING EXAMPLE

An adherent of the Rebbe of Sadiger was walking near his Rebbe's house when he saw a most unusual sight; the Rebbe was sweeping the streets of Tel Aviv himself. “How strange?” thought the man. “Can't the Rebbe have someone else do this for him?” Gathering his courage, he walked over and offered to relieve the Rebbe of the menial task of sweeping the street. “I would gladly sweep the street for the Rebbe,” he offered. The Rebbe smiled and told him a story.

When the Nazis marched into Vienna, they took me and nine other men to a prominent street and forced us to get down on our hands and knees and begin cleaning the streets. If they didn't think we were scrubbing hard enough with the toothbrushes they provided they would mercilessly beat

this necessitates giving, while other situations require taking. That is what made *Akeidas Yitzchak* different from the other trials and why it was crucial that Avraham withstand this test (especially according to those who understand that *Akeidas Yitzchak* was not even the final test). 🙏

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

The more common word used to introduce the years of someone's life in the Torah when he or she dies is the word “*yemei*,” meaning “the days of.” Here, where the Torah tells us the years of Sarah's life, the Torah uses the word “*sh'nei chaye Sarah*” which means the years of the life of Sarah. The Torah departs from its normal wording to use the word *sh'nei*, which can also mean two, to hint to the idea that Sarah had two lives. Meaning, she grew old twice, as she had been rejuvenated from her old age in order to bear Yitzchak. 🙏

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba'al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*.

us. Our blood, sweat, and tears were the polish on the streets of Vienna. Amidst it all, one of the other men noticed that a smile was playing around my lips. “You can smile now?” he asked incredulously. I told him, “They think I am cleaning their world! I am cleaning Hashem's world!” I promised Hashem at that moment that if he would deliver me from this living hell, I would clean Hashem's land of Israel as well.

“So,” the Rebbe concluded, “I am not going to let you sweep for me. I've got to do it myself!” 🙏

THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

THE BAR KOCHBA REVOLT (PART II)

There is a dispute between the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds regarding the downfall of Bar Kochba. The Babylonian Talmud in *Sanhedrin* (93b) reports quite frankly that the Sages killed Bar Kochba after they determined that he wasn't the authentic Messiah. However, the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Taanis* 4:5) offers a dramatic account of Bar Kochba's demise. Roman Emperor Hadrian sent his chief general, Julius Severus, to suppress the Bar Kochba revolt. Julius Severus launched a set of strategic attacks on smaller bands of Jewish rebels, slowly weakening Bar Kochba's powerful army. Ultimately, Bar Kochba and his remaining fighters withdrew to the city of Beitar. Julius Severus and his men laid siege for three and a half years, but the devout prayers of the holy sage and uncle of Bar Kochba, Rabbi Elazar Ha-modei, postponed the fall of Beitar. As a last resort, Julius Severus smuggled a *Kuti* (a sect of people whose conversion to Judaism was questionable) through the underground tunnel system into the city of Beitar and instructed him to locate the elderly Rabbi Elazar and pretend to whisper secret military intelligence into his ear. The *Kuti* followed orders but was subsequently apprehended by Bar Kochba's followers. When questioned by Bar Kochba, the *Kuti* replied that Rabbi Elazar had informed him that he was plotting to make peace with the Romans. Enraged at his uncle's proposal, Bar Kochba approached Rabbi Elazar and demanded that he reveal the exchange between himself and the *Kuti*. Rabbi Elazar denied that any words were spoken and, in fury, Bar Kochba kicked his uncle with his brass toe boots, killing the aging rabbi instantly. Once the sacred supplications of Rabbi Elazar ceased, the city of Beitar was as vulnerable as ever. The Roman catapults destroyed the fortified barricade around Beitar and the city was captured. Tens of thousands of Jews were brutally murdered. Such was the devastating end to one of the most courageous and daring military episodes of Jewish history. Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano writes that Bar Kochba was a descendant of the Bnei Efrayim who left Egypt before the time of redemption and were subsequently murdered by the Philistines. Accordingly, *Moshiach* ben Yosef will be a reincarnation of Bar Kochba and will mend the error of his soul by dying for the sake of Heaven at the gates of Jerusalem. 🙏