

Toras Aish

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Laban, the scoundrel with style, appears for the first time in this week's Torah reading—when Abraham's trusted servant Eliezer chooses Laban's sister Rebecca as the most suitable wife for Isaac. As the Abrahamic family saga continues in the pages of the Book of Genesis, Laban emerges as a major player, but a most negative and even destructive force: when his nephew Jacob escapes his brother Esau's wrath by seeking refuge with Uncle Laban, Laban tricks Jacob by giving him his older daughter under the nuptial canopy, stoops to chicanery to cheat Jacob out of his rightful wages, and does everything in his power to prevent Jacob from returning to his homeland of destiny, the land of Israel. Indeed the author of the Passover Haggadah cries out, "Pharaoh only decreed against the (Israelite) males, while Laban desired to uproot (Israel) entirely."

But if Laban is indeed such a scoundrel, why do our Sages learn so much from him, specifically with regard to customs surrounding marriage?! When Eliezer asks for Rebecca's hand in marriage to Isaac, Laban responds, "Let us call the young maiden, and ask as to her desire" (Genesis 24:57). From this, the Talmud derives the principle that it is forbidden for a parent to marry off his daughter without her consent (B.T. Kiddushin 2b, 41a). Our Torah portion continues, "And they blessed Rebecca" (Genesis 24:60). From this we learn the necessity of reciting a blessing over an engagement (Tractate Kallah, Tosafot ad loc). Laban's send-off to his sister are the very words recited to the bride immediately before she walks to the nuptial canopy, the words spoken at the badeken (Yiddish for the covering of the bride's face with a veil), to this very day: "our sister, may you become (the mother of) thousands of myriads, and may your seed inherit the gate of his enemies" (Genesis 24:60). And there are many religio-legal responsa which cite Laban's words in justification for his having produced the wrong sister, the elder Leah instead of the younger Rachel, under the nuptial canopy, "It is not so in our place, to give the younger before the elder" (Genesis 29:26), as representing the normative custom to be followed by parents in marrying off their daughters. Perhaps we ought even refer to this villain as Rabbenu Laban!

I would submit that Laban himself, his character and personality, is very much like his name implies: "white" on the outside, the Hebrew word *lavan* meaning white usually a metaphor for what is pure and good, but very much the conniving, venal Knave on the inside; indeed, the very letters of the name *lavan*, when read from left to right, spell out the word *naval* which means a despicable scoundrel.

The facts are that a superficial study of Laban's actions vis a vis Rebecca his sister, Leah his daughter and Jacob's wives and children could all point towards a well-meaning father desperately concerned for the welfare of his family: Laban wants to make sure that Rebecca herself truly wishes to link her destiny with Abraham's family, he is anxious to marry off his elder daughter who might well be doomed to spinsterhood without his taking a little advantage of Jacob's love for Rachel, and he wants to protect his children and grandchildren from the physical danger at the hands of Esau and the economic uncertainty of a difficult terrain which they might very well experience in the land of Israel. We might even say that Laban's motto is "family uber alles, the ends justify the means when it comes to one's children and grandchildren." And from this perspective, we can well understand why so many marriage customs are indeed derived from Laban.

When we delve a bit deeper, however, we begin to see that even in these instances of seeming familial concern, Laban's true motivations may have been his own selfish and materialistic profit. When he suggests asking Rebecca's opinion after he has already offered her to Eliezer ("Behold, Rebecca is before you, take her and go" Genesis 24:51) and has already received a generous dowry of gold and silver for her (Genesis 24:53), his sudden interest in her consent suspiciously suggests a ploy for an additional dowry. His deception under the marriage canopy was likely perpetrated in order for him to extract another seven years of free labor out of Jacob rather than out of sincere concern for the hapless Leah—who suffers shame and degradation from a marriage to a husband who does not love her. And indeed, his daughters themselves declare, "Were we not considered by (our father) as strangers, since he (virtually) sold us (to you)" (Genesis 31:15). Apparently the profit motive was never far from Laban's grasping hand and scheming heart, despite the spin of familial concern he tries to place upon his actions.

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER
DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB.
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I would further argue that the custom of a badeken and the blessing over an engagement is derived from Laban because they represent the very antithesis of what Laban stands for—indeed, the very paradox within his personality. The Yiddish word badeken means to cover, and the ceremony is literally the covering of the bride's face with a veil. The Hebrew badok means to search or investigate—and the groom investigates the face of his bride before it is covered in order to ascertain that he is getting the right bride, not falling into a laban-like trap. The sacred Zohar, however, links the Hebrew badok with the Hebrew dabok, the very same letters switched around to form a word which means cleave, as in the verse: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The Hebrew word for cleave, dabok, refers to a specifically emotional, spiritual and intellectual bonding, a meeting of hearts, souls and minds, a joining of destinies. The groom covers his bride's face, and in effect declares: "our initial attraction may well have been physical, but it has become much deeper than that, it is truly a cleaving together. I hereby cover your face and still announce my undying love for you, for your inner and most beautiful self." Laban, the man of the outside, paradoxically teaches the profound importance of the inside.

Laban is also the source for the blessing over an engagement: "Blessed art thou O Lord our G-d King of the Universe who has sanctified us with His Commandments, and commanded us concerning illicit sexual relationships;

He has forbidden us relations with our engaged brides and has permitted us relations with our married wives. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who has sanctified His nation Israel thru the nuptial canopy and engagements." This is truly an amazing blessing. Sanctity involves self-control, commitment. An engaged couple has total obligations to each other—but without the privilege of a

sexual relationship. Engagement within the Jewish tradition expresses giving without getting personal commitment without physical advantage. This is the unique Jewish introduction to the selfless love involved in marriage—and is truly a counterpoint to the grasping, greedy Laban. ©2003 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Subjective Objectivity

This week's parsha spends an inordinate amount of words telling the story of how Yitzchak's wife was chosen. Avraham instructed his servant Eliezer to travel to his homeland to find a wife for Yitzchak and, in a strict directive, Avraham demanded that Eliezer must "not take a wife (for my son) from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell" (Braishis 24:3).

Eliezer poses a theoretical question: "...Ulai lo soe'veh haeisha laleches acharai Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land; shall I take your son back to the land from which you departed?" Avraham answers him, "Beware not to return my son to there" (ibid 24:5-6).

Eliezer travels to Charan and establishes several criteria of high standards and ethical principles by which he will select the proper match for Yitzchak. Rivka approaches him and fulfills every one of these expectations.

After realizing that he has the right one, Eliezer asks B"suel, Rivka's father, for permission to take her to Yitzchak. Eliezer repeats every single aspect of the entire episode to B"suel beginning with Avraham's directives, his own setting of guidelines, and finally his meeting Rivka at the well.

Eliezer repeats in exact detail everything that occurred. He even repeats the supposition that he presented to Avraham, "Perhaps the woman will not follow me" (Braishis 24:39).

It is only at this point, as Eliezer repeats his conversations with Avraham to the prospective in-laws, that Rashi explains a fascinating angle to Eliezer's words: "Ulai lo soe'veh haeisha laleches acharai Perhaps the woman will not follow me" Rashi states: The word perhaps in the Hebrew language is ulai. It has the same Hebrew letters as the word eilai, which means "to me." Rashi tells us of a fascinating approach to the homonymic words ulai and eilai. Based on Chazal, Rashi explains that Eliezer had a daughter of his own, and he wanted her to marry Yitzchok. Thus, through the word ulai, he is surreptitiously alluding to eilai—"perhaps Yitzchak is suited to me and my family."

What is interesting to note is that this Midrashic insight is not conveyed by Rashi until Eliezer is talking to B"suel and relates to his previous repartee with Avraham. This appears 34 psukim after it was originally stated!

Only then does Rashi interject his explanation regarding Eliezer's secret desire to have Yitzchok as his own son-in-law. Why doesn't Rashi mention this immediately when Eliezer originally discussed the matter with Avraham?

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin was once asked to adjudicate a difficult business matter between two learned business men. After rendering his psak, one of the men approached him respectfully, but upset.

"I think that you were wrong in saying that I am responsible to pay. The logic based on your analysis of the Talmud is completely flawed. I accept your decision based on my respect for you, but I am disheartened."

Many months passed and the defendant forgot his grievance against Rabbi Chaim. One day Rabbi Chaim called the man over in the Bais haMedrash and asked him to explain a difficult piece of the Talmud.

"And what would you say," asked Rabbi Chaim injecting a hypothetical situation, "if the case occurred as follows?"

The man was quick to reply. "Then Reuvain would be responsible to pay the entire sum!" he shouted.

"Now think back," smiled Rav Chaim. "Was this not the exact case you presented to me? And I adjudicated exactly like you said against you?"

The man humbly accepted Rabbi Chaim's words. "Rebbe you are a hundred percent correct." Then he coyly added, "but today it was not my money!"

The Kotzker Rebbe explains why Rashi waited to explain that Eliezer secretly had alluded to the fact that he had wanted Yitzchak for his daughter. At first when the shidduch was up in the air, Eliezer did not even realize that his words had contained the connotations of his own personal interests. Only after it was evident that Rivka was clearly the chosen one, was Eliezer able to objectively look back on his own words and realize that they had intoned his personal wishes as well! It is only at that point, when Eliezer himself realizes his hidden ambition that Rashi shares it with us.

Often we think that we are clearly objective in our dealings. Only when our subjectivity is removed can we re-examine our actions and see how many times the cautionary word *ulai* represents truly *eilai*—to me!

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Summarized by *Matan Glidai*

Translated by *Kaeren Fish*

Who Was Rivka?

We learn something of Rivka's character from a number of Biblical verses and midrashim:

1. "And the girl to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your pitcher, that I may drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I shall also give the camels to drink'—it shall be she that You have appointed for Your servant, for Yitzchak..." (24:14). Rashi comments: "She (such a girl) would be worthy of him, for she would perform kindness, and therefore would be worthy of entering Avraham's household." The text describes Rivka's beauty, but makes no mention of Eliezer paying attention to this quality. He sought a woman who was kindhearted, and that is what he found.

2. "And Yitzchak went out to meditate in the field... and Rivka lifted her eyes and she saw Yitzchak, and she descended from the camel, and she said to the servant: 'Who is this man in the field approaching us?'" (24:63-64). Midrash Bereishit Rabba (60:14) teaches: "She saw that his hands were outstretched in prayer, and she said, 'Surely, this is a great man,' therefore she inquired concerning him." This teaches us three things:

i. A person's greatness becomes visible when he prays. A person's prayer indicates his spiritual level.

ii. Rivka recognized the value of prayer, and was able to perceive Yitzchak's greatness through his prayer. In the next parasha we see how she, too, prays in order to have children.

iii. "And Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sara, his mother" (24:67). Rashi explains, "He brought her to the tent and she became like his mother Sara—in other words, she veritably WAS Sara his mother, for so long as Sara lived a light remained kindled from one Shabbat eve to the next, and the dough (in the household) was blessed, and a cloud remained attached to the tent. When she died, these ceased—and when Rivka came they returned." The Midrash Rabba (60:15) describes the miraculous phenomenon slightly differently: "So long as Sara was alive a cloud was present at the entrance to her tent... the doors were open wide to invite all... there was a blessing given to the dough... there was a light that remained kindled from one Shabbat eve to the next. And when she died, these disappeared..."

We may ask the following three questions:

1. What is the significance of these phenomena? Is the Midrash simply telling us about miracles that took place when Rivka arrived?

2. Why does Rashi mention only three miracles, omitting the fact that the tent doors were opened wide, as recounted in the Midrash?

3. Why does Rashi change the order of the miracles, mentioning first the light, then the blessing of the dough and lastly the cloud—in contrast to the Midrash, which lists them in the opposite order?

Each of the three miracles mentioned by Rashi has profound significance:

"A light that remained kindled from one Shabbat eve to the next"—If there is real holiness in the home on Shabbat, then Shabbat influences the whole week. If no holiness can be felt during the week, this indicates that

Shabbat is not being imbued with the proper celebration and sanctity. The light that remained kindled from one Shabbat to the next symbolized how the holiness that existed in Rivka's home on Shabbat continued throughout the week.

"A blessing sent to the dough"—This is not a miracle, but rather a matter of psychology. There are some people who turn away those who come to their homes, claiming that they have nothing to give their guests to eat. Someone who truly wants to show hospitality will demonstrate how, even when it seems that there is nothing to eat, somehow there is enough for everyone, and no-one remains hungry. The "blessing in the dough" does not depend on wealth, but rather on good will. Therefore, Rashi fails to mention "the doors opened wide," for this and the blessing in the dough represent the same quality.

"A cloud attached to the tent"—Each household needs to have a spiritual purpose, something beyond the basic maintenance of the household, some spiritual goal to which it can aspire. On this point, it is worth noting the Midrash Rabba on the akeida (56:2): "And he saw the place from afar' -- what did he see? He saw a cloud attached to the mountain. He said to Yitzchak, 'My son, do you see what I see?' He answered, 'Yes.' He said to his two servants, 'Do you see what I see?' They answered, 'No.' He said, 'Since the donkey does not see and you do not see either, remain here with the donkey.'" This midrash indicates the need to cultivate a spiritual view of the world, one which looks beyond the merely physical aspects of life.

Rashi, adopting an educational approach, lists the miracles from the smallest to the greatest. First, one has to observe the basic mitzvot such as Shabbat. Then one also must address the mitzvot pertaining to interpersonal relationships and kindness. Finally, it is important that there should be some lofty spiritual goal—a cloud attached to the tent. The Midrash, on the other hand, simply lists the miracles in the order of their actual realization in the case of Rivka: since she had a superior spiritual purpose, the other phenomena followed naturally. (*Delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Chayei Sara 5753 [1992].*)

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When Avraham asked Eliezer to go to his hometown of Charan in order to find a wife for Yitzchok, the servant responded by saying "maybe the woman will not want to follow me to this land" (Beraishis 24:5). The Vilna Gaon says that there are two ways to say "maybe" in Biblical Hebrew- "oo-lie" and "pen." The former indicates that the person is hoping that what "may" happen does in fact happen, while the latter is said when hoping that it does not come to be. Therefore, since Eliezer said "oo-lie," it was as if he said, "hopefully she will not want to return with

me." This, the Vilna Gaon continues, is the basis for the Midrash (quoted by Rashi on 24:39) that says that Eliezer had a daughter that he was hoping would marry Yitzchok. If the relative from Charan refused to return, his daughter had a chance of being the bride instead.

Rashi quotes this Midrash when Eliezer repeats the conversation he had with Avraham to Lavan and Besu-el (Rivka's brother and father), not when the conversation actually happens. It is obvious that he does so because it is only in this repetition that the word "oo-lie" is written with a letter missing. Without the "vav" as the second letter, the word can also be read as "ay-lie," meaning "to" or "for me," i.e. he wanted Yitzchok to be his own son-in-law. The question many commentators ask is why the Torah left the letter out of the word the second time it was written, rather than the first time. Wouldn't it be more appropriate to point out Eliezer's real intention when he actually says it, rather than when he repeats it to Avraham's relatives?

The Kutzker Rebbe and Rav Eliyahu Dessler both say that the Torah is teaching us about human nature, showing how we are blinded by our own biases. When Eliezer first asked Avraham what he should do if the woman does not want to return with him, he didn't even realize that the question stemmed from his desire that she wouldn't want to, in order that his own daughter could marry Yitzchok. Therefore, the word "oo-lie" was written with all of its letters. However, after seeing G-d's hand in his finding Rivka, and realizing that she was the one who Yitzchok should marry, this bias became irrelevant. It was only after being removed from the bias that he was able to recognize that it had even existed. For that reason, the Torah leaves out the "vav" during the repetition of events, when Eliezer understood how subjective his question had been.

The Chizkuni takes it a step further, explaining that only the second "oo-lie" is written in a way that indicates Eliezer's having wanted Yitzchok to marry his daughter because it was said specifically to Rivka's relatives- in order to convince them to let her marry Yitzchok. After all, he had wanted Yitzchok to be his own son-in-law, so he must be quite a find! In other words, Eliezer didn't only recognize his own bias, but counteracted it by using it as a means to accomplish the exact opposite of what the bias had been for! Instead of trying to convince Rivka's relatives not to send her, he used his desire that his daughter marry Yitzchok to convince them to send her!

Rashi (24:42) quotes the Midrash that "the conversations of the servants of our forefathers are held in higher regard by G-d than the Torah of the sons, as the story of Eliezer[s quest for a wife for Yitzchok] is repeated, while many of the Torah's laws are only learned out via hints and implications." Rav Dessler says that this (the importance of Eliezer's conversation) includes the lesson learned about human biases. It is only by recognizing our biases and then compensating

for (or counteracting against) them that we can best understand what G-d really wants and expects from us.

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RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**A**nd these are the days of the years of the life of Avraham which he lived: One hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Avraham expired and died at a good old age, mature and content and he was gathered to his people.” (Breishis 22:7-8)

There are descriptions given about the conclusion of Avraham's life that are not found by anyone else. Why does the verse mention "the days of the years" of his life? By Yishmael, who is immediately juxtaposed, only the years of his life are counted! Why does the verse tell us "that he lived"? What else does one do with their life? It seems rather redundant.

This quote from the Zohar (Parshas Emor) might help us to focus in: "We learn that when one does a deed down below it arouses a reaction above. If a person behaves in a certain way below a commensurate force is awakened on high. Someone does a deed of kindness in this world, kindness is awakened above. It rests upon that day and crowns it for him. If a person acts mercifully below, mercy is aroused on that day and it is crowned on his account. That day then stands as a shield for him whenever it becomes necessary for him..."

It seems from the Zohar that there's a unit of time, which is not arbitrary, it is called a "day". We are told that a given day is titled after the person whose behavior wakes up the heavenly mood of that day. Each day has a unique reason for being and different expression, as it says, "Day after day utters speech and night after night declares knowledge." (Tehillim 19)

I have observed that little children live happily in twenty-four hour cycles. One day everything is good. The next, for whatever reason, it's terrible. It could be something as simple as not liking snack. After we get a little older, we tend to look back at good years and bad, be it in school or business. Later still we begin to talk about the 80's or the 90's. Decades start to take on nostalgic color and meaning. By the end, in the nursing home, there etched on the faces, a lifetime of experiences, we see distinctly drawn expressions of sweetness or bitterness. The whole life is thought of as either good or bad.

As "twelve step" lingo leaks out into daily life it has become popular to talk about "one day at a time". About Avraham too it states in the verse, "And Avraham the elder came with his days...(Breishis 24:1) Each day was accounted for and filled with maximum productivity. In the army, in college and in prison people "do years". We are taught by the life of Avraham to "do days".

It's important to know that this same Avraham spent decades of his early days and years in intensive research. He didn't have a clear path of tradition from birth. At the age of three he posited a theory about the Oneness of the The Creator. Until he had completed the paradigm of his thesis and began his career teaching he was already in his 50's.

Perhaps, one could suggest that those days and years should be deducted from the totality of his productive life. That time, though, was not for naught. He had to begin his search and proceed methodically from wherever he was. Both the time in search of the greatest and clearest picture of reality and the time spent living up to what he came know are all accounted to him as "the days of the years that he lived".

The contentment he achieved at the conclusion of his life was not the product of a last minute lunge for meaning. No! If life is perceived as "good" in the end, it is the cumulative result of moment by moment and daily choices over many years and changing conditions to happily confront the challenge of today. © 2003 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Andrew Shaw, Director of TRIBE

Several years ago on a return flight to London, I watched *Ever After*, a modern adaptation of the much loved fairy tale Cinderella. The film, far from being worthy of an Academy Award nomination, featured a poignant ending. In lieu of the typical carriage riding off into the sunset and the heroine living happily ever after, the final line was, "It was not so much that she lived happily ever after, but that she lived."

These sentiments are brought home beautifully in this week's Sidra with the life of our matriarch, Sarah. In the first verse of the Sidra, we read, 'Sarah's life was one hundred and twenty seven years, the years of Sarah's life'. The word *chayei*, life, is mentioned twice. Similarly, when Abraham's life is mentioned at the end of the Sidra we read, 'The days of the years of Abraham's life, which he lived'(25:7). Here, once again one notices the seeming redundancy.

R. Zalman Sorotskin provides an insightful explanation. He says the Torah is highlighting that Abraham and Sarah were alive, in the Torah sense of the word, during all their years, using their time on earth to share their knowledge of G-d and to practice kindness at every opportunity. For them, each day was utilized for a sublime purpose.

The Gemara in Berachot tells us cryptically that the righteous are alive even when dead and conversely, the wicked are dead even when alive. The Gemara can be understood perfectly using the approach of R. Sorotzkin. Someone whose life is not contributing to the world may be physically alive but in Torah terms he is very much dead, while the imprint that a righteous

person leaves on the world continues long after he or she has passed on.

I recall Rav Avigdor Nevenzhai, Rav of the Old City of Jerusalem, gave a shiur while I attended Yeshivat Hakotel some years ago. Although the shiur was in Hebrew he said to us in perfect English, 'The world says Time is money, the Torah says Time is life.'

Today, it is easy to allow the days to march on without maximising the time we have been granted. We frantically fill our days with a plethora of activities, but when we reflect on our personal time sheet we may well feel that we have not utilized our time as best we could.

That was not the case with Sarah. Her 127 years on this earth were extraordinary and we still learn from her and Abraham's legacy today. The seemingly redundant phrase teaches us simply that she did not merely live but lived her entire life on a glorious level of existence—she most certainly lived!

ON G-D AND GOOD

by Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

A scene engraved in the Jewish imagination: the aged Abraham, sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day, looks up and sees three passers-by. He rushes to greet them and urges them to eat, drink and rest. "Let a little water be brought," he says, but then he and Sarah—despite the heat and their age—engage in a flurry of activity, Sarah baking bread, Abraham preparing a calf, offering their guests a lavish meal.

This is no mere story. It is a Biblical video of Jewish values in action. To be a Jew is to welcome strangers. The Sages went further. Immediately before the men pass by, the Torah tells us that "G-d appeared to Abraham," yet it is not until the visitors leave that G-d speaks. From this the Rabbis inferred that Abraham asked G-d to wait until he had seen to the needs of his guests. They drew the majestic conclusion: "Hospitality is even greater than welcoming the Divine presence."

How can anything be greater than welcoming the Divine presence? Perhaps the meaning is this: in Tenakh angels often appear in the guise of human beings. The word "angel"—malakh—does not always mean what it does in the mystic visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel: an ethereal being next to the heavenly Throne of Glory. Often it means "a messenger," someone whose appearance is part of the Divine script.

By treating their visitors as if they were angels, Abraham and Sarah were in fact welcoming the Divine presence—not as did Isaiah and Ezekiel in a vision, but by responding to the image of G-d in the face of a stranger. To see G-d in heaven is one of the heights of religious experience, but to see the trace of G-d in human beings is even higher. It is what made Abraham and Sarah the grandparents of an utterly new kind of faith.

In the Synagogue where I first served as a Rabbi, there was a couple who sat near the back of the

Shul and the ladies' gallery. They were quiet people. They sought no honour or recognition. But whenever a stranger appeared, they would welcome them, make them feel at home, and invite them to a meal. Through this simple and lovely act, they brought many people "under the wings of the Divine presence." I used to think of them as our Abraham and Sarah. It was a privilege to know them.

When the strangers first appeared to Abraham the Torah says that they were nitzavim alav, literally "standing above him." After all, they were angels; he was only a human being. But when he serves them food, the Torah says hu omed aleihem, "he stood above them"—for when we welcome strangers we are lifted even higher than angels. © 2003 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The city of Chevron is very prominent in our world and in the daily news reports. The news from Chevron is not always encouraging. It is a tough place, this Chevron of ours - a tough place to live and a tough place to leave. In the Torah we read of the purchase of the Cave of Machpela by our father Avraham. This purchase was supposed to eternally establish that holy place as being the property of the people of Israel. But it hasn't worked out that way. Over the long centuries, Yishmael and his descendants and Eisav and his descendants have successfully contested Israel for these premises innumerable times. For over a millennium Jews were not allowed to enter the building, which supposedly rests on the top of that burial cave. The right of Jews to live in Chevron is and has always been contested far more bitterly than even the right of Jews to live in Jerusalem. Why? What is the secret of Chevron that makes it so dangerous and so contested a place for Jewish settlement and security?

The Talmud mentions that there are three locations in the Land of Israel, which are indisputably the legal property of the Jewish people. They are the Cave of Machpela in Chevron, the field outside Shechem/Nablus in Samaria, and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. All three locations were purchased by the leaders of Israel - Avraham, Yakov, David - for good and valuable consideration and for full, if not more than full, market value. The purchases and the details of those purchases are all recorded in the Bible. Yet, over our long history, even till this very moment, our title to all three locations is in dispute. The insight into this paradoxical situation may be that the very reason these properties are contested - because our claim to them is based on man-made law, contracts and deeds and not on Divine promise.

All contracts, even all purchases in this world of ours, are always subject to review, revision and cancellation. Governments rise and fall, circumstances

and situations change, the definition of "rights" is altered by fiat or common consent. In short, nothing ever remains the same. Nothing in the world created by man is permanent. Therefore, the general world, and certainly the Arab world, contests our claim of ownership to these parcels of land in Israel. Our deed is outdated and no longer valid, they say. We abandoned our claim long ago by not being present on those properties for long centuries. The Indian tribes in America also had signed and legal government deeds to large sections of the United States, but when the circumstances "changed," the deeds were abrogated, and the Indian tribes' claim to the land was disallowed. Claims to land are not very secure if they are based only upon legalities, purchases and contracts. The entire thrust of the book of Bereshith is that the world and its lands and properties belong not to man but to the Creator.

The claim of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is not based on contracts and deeds. Indeed, it is not based even on Balfour Declarations and United Nations'™ resolutions. It is based upon the Godly promise to our ancestors that the Land of Israel belongs, by right of Godly fiat, to their descendants. Those Jews, who, for various personal and faith reasons, deny this Godly promise, are very hard pressed to justify the existence of the state of Israel and the Jewish claim to Jerusalem. Without this justification of belief and Jewish tradition, the claim of the nations of the world that "you are thieves" sounds plausible and correct. The faith of Israel is based upon the revelation and will of our eternal Creator. We certainly have to do our part, for God certainly helps those who help themselves. But, in the final analysis, it is obvious that we derive our rights and claims not merely from current behavior, but rather from rights based upon ancient faith and religious tenets and beliefs. As Rabbi Saadya Gaon stated: "Our nationhood is based solely on the Torah." Chevron and the Cave of Machpela prove how right he is. © 2003 Rabbi B. Wein

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Jewish organizations rely heavily on individual donors. Often, however, ethical dilemmas arise when dealing with some contributors.

For some beneficiaries these ethical struggles are irrelevant. After all, many agencies are so strapped for resources that they must raise massive amounts of money to survive. In some circles, the attitude seems to be, Take the money; never mind where it comes from.

It shouldn't be this way. Charities should be more selective about their financial sources. While donors perform a mitzvah in giving, recipients play no less a role in the mitzvah by providing the opportunity to give. In Jewish tradition it is an honor to give. Hence,

recipients have a right, as well as the obligation, to develop criteria for donors.

Donations—large or small—should come from ethical endeavors only. This idea accords with an age old tradition recorded in the Talmud. The obligation for the lulav ritual (the commandment to take lulav and etrog on Sukkot) cannot be fulfilled with a stolen lulav.

A more difficult policy to implement is the idea that even money earned ethically should be rejected if given by someone who lives contrary to Jewish values. This principle raises the question of who, for the purpose of receiving tzedakah, falls into this category? Where is the line to be drawn? Spousal abuse? Intermarriage? Eating on Yom Kippur? Violating the Sabbath? Tax evasion?

I believe the litmus test should be the way in which potential donors conduct their relations with others. We should leave it to God to decide who is sinning against Him. But in the area of interpersonal relationships, we must take a stand and say that we will not be party to the mistreatment of others.

This point is illustrated in this week's portion Hayei Sarah. Commentators ask why Abraham the Patriarch preferred a wife from his birthplace for his son Isaac rather than a woman from Canaan. After all, both were places of idolatry, and Abraham and Isaac were living in Canaan.

Rabbeinu Nissim answers that in Canaan, people mistreated each other. In Abraham's birthplace, they may have sinned against God, but there was respect and love between people.

In other words, explains the great biblical scholar Nechama Leibovitz, "it was the not the ideas and beliefs of the family of the girl destined to be the mother of the nation that were apt to endanger the whole nation, but the evil deeds." Organizations must likewise avoid the endangering influence of contributors who harm other people.

Those who donate must be given credit and honor; they play a critical role in the Jewish community. But we must remember that giving is a privilege, and the recipient of tzedakah also bestows an honor. There is after all, an ethic of taking. © 2002 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's Torah portion is concerned mainly with a description of the way that Rivka is brought to Yitzchak. Avraham does not give his slave a list of traits that he expects his daughter-in-law to have, but he does make a specific request. "Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites" [Bereishit 24:3]. This clearly emphasizes what the wise slave already knows: the woman must have high ethical values, similar to those of his own master. And the

portion indeed emphasizes many points of similarity between Rivka and Avraham, thereby showing that Rivka was not a random choice.

At the beginning of the Torah portion, Avraham tells his slave, "You shall go to my land and my birthplace" [24:4], and when he retells the events the slave says, "Go to my father's house" [24:38]. This of course reminds us of Avraham's first test, when the Almighty turned to him. "Go for your sake from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house" [12:1]. This leads us to a better understanding of the difficult test that Rivka must pass, when she is asked to leave her family and accompany this man who has appeared. We see the great strength in her seemingly simple agreement, "I will go" [24:58].

As the story unfolds, the slave tries to determine the girl's character and to see how similar she is to his master. He turns to her and asks, "Let me drink a small amount of water from your jug" [24:17]. This is again reminiscent of Avraham, especially his traits of kindness and welcoming guests. "Let a small amount of water be brought, and wash your feet" [18:4] (washing the feet is also mentioned in this week's portion, 24:32). And Avraham promised very little but he quickly accomplished a lot: "And Avraham hurried... Quickly, take three 'sa'im' of fine flour... And Avraham ran to the cattle... And he rushed to prepare it." [18:6-7]. The same is true of Rivka. "And she hurried and lowered her jug... And she hurried and emptied her jug... And she ran again to the well to draw water." [24:18,20].

Rivka's taking leave of her family might remind us in some ways of the sacrifice of Yitzchak. In both cases, the objective was a total separation between a father and his child. Avraham, who was commanded to do an extreme act of separation by offering his son as a sacrifice, does it diligently. "And Avraham rose early in the morning" [19:27]. Lavan and Betuel are also asked to separate themselves, but the Torah hints that what really interested them was the gold and silver that the slave had brought with him. "When he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's hands..." [24:30]. This is also implied by the boastful way the slave describes his master: "And He gave him sheep and cattle, gold and silver, slaves and maids" [24:35]. However, in spite of this they try to hinder Rivka's trip. "And they rose in the morning... Let the maiden remain with us for a year or a decade..." [24:54-55]. However, Rivka is ready to start out immediately. And her family therefore blesses her, "Let your offspring conquer the gates of their enemies" [24:60], similar to the way Avraham was blessed after the binding of Yitzchak, "Let your offspring conquer the gate of their enemies" [22:17].

Avraham lived in an area of idol worship, and that is where he was chosen. "Your ancestors always lived on the other side of the river— Terach, father of Avraham and father of Nachor—and they worshipped other gods. And I took your father Avraham from the

other side of the river." [Yehoshua 24:2-3]. Rivka lived in the same area, with all its faults. Just like Avraham, she knew how to remain on a path of charity and kindness, and when the time came she knew to respond to G-d's call and go to Eretz Yisrael.

RABBI SHMUEL CHOUKA

The Rabbi's Message

"Sarah's lifetime was one hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years; the years of Sarah's life" (Beresheet 23:1)

Rashi comments that the apparently superfluous phrase, "the years of Sarah's life," teaches us that all of Sarah's years were "equal for goodness." It would seem that it is not Rashi's intent to comment on the pleasantness of Sarah's personal physical existence, for as we know, there were periods of her life that were not pleasant. Sarah endured the anguish of years of being childless. She also endured aggravation from her maidservant Hagar. These years were certainly not "equal for goodness" to the rest of Sarah's life. What, then, is the meaning of Rashi's comment?

Perhaps we can explain that Rashi is referring to a different "goodness"; namely, the goodness that Sarah shared with the world. No matter what was happening in Sarah's personal life, whether she was joyous or troubled, her actions towards other people were the same. The acts of goodness that Sarah regularly performed, the kindness that she bestowed upon her guests—all remained totally unaffected by the trials and tribulations of her personal existence. In this way, says Rashi, all of the years of Sarah's life were indeed "equal for goodness." (Darash Moshe on the Torah)



"And Abraham was old, he came with his days." (Beresheet 24:1)

The Torah tells us that Abraham "came with his days." This teaches us that every single day, Abraham accomplished whatever he needed to accomplish on that day. He did not waste a single day of his life.

It is written in Pirkei Abot: "If not now, when?" Our Sages explain that a person shouldn't procrastinate, saying, "I'll do it tomorrow" because tomorrow has its own set of accomplishments that need to be done. Every day has its own package of deeds that are waiting to be performed. A person should approach each day with a specific goal of what he intends to achieve on that day. It is also helpful to reflect at the end of the day, to see whether you indeed reached the goals you set for yourself.

Question: What good thing did you accomplish today? Do you feel that your day could have been more productive? What are your goals for tomorrow?

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