

spiritual strength. Sarah lived an exemplary life.

Furthermore, Sarah possessed another character trait that is just as difficult to acquire. "At seven years old as at twenty" means to say that at twenty years old, she served G-d as a child of seven years, with great innocent faith, since a child does not have an evil inclination, and moreover the Heavenly Court only punishes beginning from the age of twenty (Bamidbar Rabba 18:3), meaning that it is as if a child does not commit any sins. In the same way, at the age of one hundred, at the age when an old woman is weak and without any strength, she served G-d with vigor as at twenty years of age, in full possession of all her strength.

The one who serves G-d in his old age with the same vigor as in his youth merits that which is stated: "Happy is youth that has not brought shame to old age" (Sukkah 53a). In his old age, he will not be ashamed of his youth. In extending this concept, we clearly understand that there are hidden sources of energy in every man, and that he should realize his potential by the observance of the commandments and the service of G-d throughout his entire life.

Each man has natural strength, known and available to him, which he puts into practice so as not to profane Shabbat, not to steal, not to murder, to honor his parents as he should – things obvious to everyone. Yet in concert with this, there is the hidden strength of his soul, strength that he must awaken and put into use. He must also create and acquire strength that he does not naturally have. It is said concerning Rabbi Tarphon that when his mother's shoes had torn, he put the palms of his hands on the ground so that his mother could place her feet on them. Insofar as she accepted that he do this, this gesture demonstrated his mother's great spiritual strength, as well as demonstrating a great acquiescence on the part of Rabbi Tarphon, who begged his mother to walk on his hands. Despite this, when he fell ill the Sages told Rabbi Tarphon's mother, "He still hasn't arrived at half of what the law demands in order to honor one's parents." The Torah does not reveal the reward for keeping the commandments because each commandment, even the simplest ones, can be performed with immeasurable love and devotion. Therefore there is no reason to reveal the reward that follows for keeping a commandment. The same action can demand a great self-sacrifice or very little effort, and the Torah rewards the effort and the true intention, not the act in and of itself. It is not possible to know the reward, because the performance of a commandment can be without limit in its perfection. Man possesses hidden strengths that allow him to attain the summit of perfection, and everything that he joyfully adds by himself is appreciated and valued by G-d.

Concerning G-d, it is said that "in His goodness He renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation." In other words, the world ages according to natural laws, yet it is renewed and rejuvenated from day to day. In the same way, man has hidden strengths

that are renewed each day. In his old age he can feel young. It is like a man on a boat who can no longer row because he has no strength left, the oars dropping from his hands. Then suddenly, drawing new energy, he seizes the oars and overcomes the waves to row the boat successfully to shore. It is the same with spiritual strength. Every man should draw from within himself new strength, for each man possesses the capability to renew his strength, in multiplying in himself that which he already naturally has. This is possible because he has received, along with his free will, the ability to do so. All depends on his will and the effort that he puts into maintaining and developing his natural strength.

It is not enough to study Torah and to perform its commandments. We are also obligated to devote all our efforts to it, in the sense of what Rabbi Israel Salanter, of blessed memory, said when he stated, "Putting effort into Torah, this is the sweat that actually beads off one's brow during Torah study." It is thus when we are really "occupied with Torah" and that we truly progress "from strength to strength."

When G-d wanted to give the Torah to Israel, He said, "Present Me with guarantors who will ensure that you will obey it" (Tanhuma Vayigash 2). G-d refused to accept those who received the Torah as guarantors for themselves. He also refused the proposal of the Patriarchs, as well as the Prophets, as guarantors. However when Israel said, "Our children will be our guarantors," G-d accepted this guarantee and gave them the Torah.

It must be explained why G-d did not just say right away to Israel, "I will give you My Torah on condition that your children be guarantors," and why He waited until Israel themselves presented their children as such.

It seems that G-d simply wanted to give the Children of Israel the liberty of choosing their guarantors. If they really wanted to perform the Torah, they had the obligation to choose guarantors that would assure the continuity of its practice. If they truly desired the Torah, G-d wanted to demonstrate to them – by allowing them to choose their guarantors – that their desire should be sincere.

How do their children constitute a guarantee? Great certainty is required to make one's children a guarantee. A man is naturally prepared to sacrifice his life for his children, especially for an only child. However in this case, he is risking the life of his children by making them guarantors for himself, in the sense of that which it is stated, "[I visit] the iniquity of fathers upon children" (Exodus 20:5). Accepting that their children be their guarantors was a great risk that they took, yet it demonstrated their firm conviction to uphold the Torah. Being ready to put one's children's lives at risk reveals exceptional confidence that the Torah will always be observed

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

It is written, “And I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me’” (Genesis 24:39). Rashi explains: “The word ulai (אולי – ‘perhaps’) is here written as eilai (אלי – ‘to me’). Eliezer had a daughter, and he looked for a way to encourage Abraham to ask that she marry his son.”

Many commentators ask why the Torah alludes to this thought during Eliezer’s account to Laban and Bethuel, and not during his initial response to Abraham, a response that, on the contrary, uses the full term ulai (with the vav). It would seem more relevant to get the message across at the time that he was speaking to Abraham, the principle decision maker. It is, for that matter, here that the Midrash explains the first ulai: “The Canaanite has in his hands faulty balances to cheat the beloved one” (see Hosea 12:8). “The Canaanite” – that is Eliezer; “has in his hands faulty balances” – for he weighed the merits of his daughter, asking himself if she was worthy of this honor or not; “to cheat the beloved one” – to cheat the most loved person in the world, meaning Isaac. Eliezer said, “Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land” (Genesis 24:5), thinking that in such a case he would give him his daughter. Why did Rashi wait until the second account to mention this point?

In order to explain this, let us look at the text a little closer. Why did Eliezer feel the need to make this detail known to Laban and Bethuel? Why did he need to tell them what he had said to Abraham?

The Maggid of Dubno clarifies this point to us with a parable.

A shopkeeper always conducted his long distance business through an intermediary that purchased his merchandise on credit from a wholesaler and brought it to him. The shopkeeper would pay for purchases on a fixed date, and thus he maintained his business. He always operated in this fashion.

One day, he had the idea of sending his intermediary to obtain a considerable amount of merchandise and to keep that fixed date pending without ever sending anyone to pay the bill. The intermediary did not look favorably on this approach,

for he was right to find it dishonest. He tried to evade the issue by claiming that the wholesaler would probably not extend him credit for such a large amount.

“Why would he all of a sudden begin to refuse?” the shopkeeper snapped back at him. “Up to now he hasn’t been inconvenienced in the least!”

Forced to comply with the demand, the intermediary therefore left for the wholesaler. When he got there he told him, “My boss asked me to come and get a very large quantity of merchandise on credit, like usual, and I told him that in my opinion you wouldn’t accept it. All the same, he told me to go.”

The wholesaler noticed that the end of the intermediary’s remarks were unnecessary, and concluded from this that it would be dangerous to sell him merchandise on credit this time. He therefore refused for the sole reason that the intermediary had conveyed this sentiment to him by recounting the discussion that he had with his boss.

Eliezer was looking for a way to make Laban refuse Abraham’s request so that he could propose his daughter instead. His mission risked failing if he told Laban and Bethuel what he had said to Abraham, namely “Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land,” for they would feel that there was something a little suspicious about the whole affair. Without that, who would refuse to give their daughter to Isaac? There had to be some hidden flaw that made the servant tell his master, “Perhaps the woman shall not wish to follow me to this land.” We now understand why the Midrash focuses its commentary on the place of the first ulai. Eliezer’s sole desire was that the woman refuse. However, proof for this lies in the fact that he repeated to Laban and Bethuel the discussion that he had with Abraham, hoping in this way to provoke their refusal.

Reasoning a posteriori, this demonstrates the intentions that Eliezer had when he spoke to Abraham. This is why the allusion appears in the discourse that Eliezer had with Laban. There, the word ulai (eilai) is written without the letter vav. The explanation is based essentially on this portion of the story, which is why Rashi’s commentary is found on that passage, not on the one in which Eliezer speaks to Abraham.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was a Tzaddik who led G-d's battle against the Reform movement and other ideas foreign to Judaism that were rampant in Germany. He was Rabbi of several cities, brought numerous people back to G-d, built up many exemplary Jewish communities, and wrote several books on Torah and Judaism that were accepted by all the Jewish people. We shall speak a little about the city of Frankfurt, of which he was rabbi. He rebuilt the city's Jewish community after its spiritual destruction. In Frankfurt, the city of the Shlah and the Pnei Yehoshua, the spirit of the French Enlightenment movement had broken down the walls of the ghetto. Following the collapse of the old community's bulwarks, the Reformists had taken control. The teaching of Torah was prohibited and enforced by the local police, so much so that those who had been faithful to G-d studied like Marranos – in hiding. A fine of 50 gulden was imposed on anyone who supported the study of Torah. In the name of the public authorities, the committee that represented the Jewish community decided that all its members would be chosen from among Reform Jews. This would abolish the Chevra Kadisha and deliberately neglect those synagogues that had maintained traditional customs. The Orthodox of the city were forced to use the mikvehs in the city's suburbs, for those in town had been blocked up. When the Chatam Sofer was asked why he didn't return to Frankfurt to repair these breaches, he answered that a special neshama was called to go there, and he specified what his role would be.

The Chatam Sofer repeated his remarks five days before his death. He was already very weak and confined to bed when he whispered with all his remaining strength, "In my mind, I see a great savor for German Judaism. Some good will still come out of Germany."

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch invested all his energy so that the good, in fact, should appear. He led a frenzied effort to reestablish prayer, the study of Torah, and the observance of kashrut into the community, but the status quo was very difficult to change. This is why he came to Frankfurt. He wanted to infuse it with Jewish warmth, a task that had nothing easy about it. Those opposed to his efforts silently allowed the construction of an orthodox synagogue to go ahead, however when the Rav decided to establish a school even before the synagogue was completed, a storm erupted. The Reformists thought that the ancient community, with the study of Torah and the Shulchan

Aruch, had been completely laid to rest, and yet here, before their very eyes, an ancient, "outdated" Judaism was being revived! Yet Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch had no intention whatsoever of relinquishing his stance on education, which he saw as the essential task of his mission. The following incident relates a wonderful example of this.

One day in Frankfurt, a young woman from the orthodox congregation of Adath Yeshuron came to see him. She also brought along her six year old son. She wanted to raise the child, who had just reached school age, according to the principles of the Torah and tradition, and so she asked him what she should do.

A slight frown appeared on Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's forehead. "Now?" he asked surprisingly. "Now the child is six years old? It is already far too late. The education of a child begins on the day of his birth. One must know why a baby cries – if it's because of hunger or another reason. From the cradle, the development of his character must be directed. Now, let's see what we can still do."

This is what Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch demanded of himself. For 24 years, he personally directed the school that he founded. He delved into the children's world, even playing with them in the courtyard. The children recounted to their parents that he even took an interest in their stamp collections. Faults can develop even on the playground, so one should be conscious of this in order to halt these things in time and guide students in the right path.

The members of the community became ever more numerous from year to year. Only a small number of those that joined the initial core group were native to Frankfurt. The Jews of the surrounding towns that had settled in the city because of its economic development had become the majority. At the end of 25 years, the community consisted of 325 families. Thus when Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch climbed the platform of the synagogue to announce that money was needed to expand the synagogue, almost 50,000 gulden, an enormous sum at the time, was collected by the end of three days of fundraising. The number of kosher butchers increased to three, and the mikvehs had reopened. On Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch experienced a moment of satisfaction. From his apartment that was situated over the Main, he could see just how many people from the community went to practice the custom of Tashlich. This number increased every year, and the example of Frankfurt began to spread to communities near and far.

His Hilloula is on Tevet 27