

THE ELEVATION OF THE EMISSARY WHO COMPLETES HIS MISSION

The Path To Follow Chayei Sarah

159

November 18th 06
27 Heshvan 5767

Publication
HEVRAT PINTO
Under Aegis of
RABBI DAVID HANANIA
PINTO CHLITA
11, rue du plateau
75019 PARIS
Tel: +331 42 08 25 40
Fax +331 42 08 50 85
www.hevratpinto.org
Responsible of publication
Hanania Soussan

Guard Your Tongue!

Preparing the Foundations of Blessings

The Chafetz Chaim said, "I am truly amazed by the fact that people who regularly speak evil of others still do not hesitate to request blessings and segulot from tzaddikim for success in earning a livelihood. Do they expect a blessing to outweigh the strength of their sinful ways? The Torah states, 'Accursed is one who strikes his fellow stealthily' [Deuteronomy 27: 24], which the Sages interpret as a curse upon one who speaks Lashon Harah. This curse was uttered in the presence of the entire Jewish people, who collectively answered Amen to its pronouncement. Can the blessing of even a tzaddik outweigh the power of this curse?"

With regards to the term arur ("accursed"), the Sages have said that it may result in excommunication (Shevuot 36a). Thus by speaking Lashon Harah, a person destroys everything good that may come his way.

Our parsha recounts the mission of Abraham's servant Eliezer, which was to journey to Abraham's home and find a wife for his son Isaac.

When Eliezer arrived at his destination, he encountered Rebecca near a well and presented her with gifts. Rebecca then returned home and told her entire family what had happened. When her brother Laban learned of this, he was immediately seized with a desire to steal from Eliezer. Scripture says of Laban: "When he saw the nose ring and the bracelets...he went to the man, and behold, he was standing by the camels at the fountain, and he said, 'Come, O blessed of the L-RD'" (Genesis 24:30-31). On this the Midrash states: "When he saw the nose ring, he immediately went out to kill him. Realizing that something bad was about to happen, Eliezer invoked the Name of Hashem and levitated the camels over the wells, and then he levitated himself besides the camels. When Laban saw this, he realized that Eliezer was a tzaddik. Therefore he said to him, 'Come, O blessed of the L-RD,' for Laban mistook Eliezer for Abraham, and in fact they looked the same. Although Eliezer was a descendant of Canaan, he was able to move from the category of the accursed to that of the blessed because he served the tzaddik so faithfully" (Yalkut Shimoni 108).

We need to understand why Eliezer levitated the camels in addition to himself. By levitating himself alone, Laban would have still realized that Eliezer was a tzaddik, therefore why include the camels as well? Also, how was it possible that Laban, who was a thoroughly wicked idol-worshipper, mentioned Hashem's Name in saying, "Come, O blessed of the L-RD"? How could he be trusted? Even later on when he said, "The matter stemmed from the L-RD" (Genesis 24:50), are we to assume that he suddenly believed in the reality of Hashem, Whom he had completely denied up to that point? Even when Jacob would later dwell with Laban, he continued to practice idolatry and learned nothing from Jacob's Torah, nor from the Torah of his sons and daughters. Yet here he suddenly believes in Hashem and invokes His Name several times?

Above all, we need to understand why Abraham made Eliezer swear that he would find a wife for his son from among his own family. Eliezer taught the Torah of his master to others (Yoma 28b), hence it is obvious that he would carry out Abraham's instructions. How could it be, then, that Abraham had so little faith in Eliezer that he made him take an oath?

Let us try to explain this as best we can. When Eliezer encountered Rebecca by the well and gave her jewels, she returned home and told her mother what had happened. Upon hearing this, Laban quickly realized that Eliezer was carrying a great deal of wealth, as our Sages have mentioned. At that point, however, Laban suddenly perceived that Eliezer's face resembled Abraham's. This means that Eliezer had elevated himself so greatly that he eventually looked like him.

Since Abraham brought people to G-d (Bereshith Rabba 39: 14), Eliezer obviously did the same, for he drank from the Torah of his master for the sake of others. Thus Eliezer succeeded in bringing Laban a bit closer to Hashem, and therefore Laban evoked His Name by saying, "Come, O blessed of

the L-RD." Consequently, when Eliezer perceived his own spiritual stature, his personal interests began to assail him. He had a daughter that he wanted Isaac to marry, since he had served Abraham faithfully and did not see why he should remain cursed forever.

Despite all this, Eliezer overcame his great trial. He paid no attention to his personal interests, and instead was happy to leave on his mission and carry it out. In fact he saw his error and realized that the reason he changed from being accursed to blessed was because of his loyalty to his mission, without which he would have remained cursed. Why did his face begin to resemble Abraham's? It was because he was Abraham's emissary, and as the Sages tell us: "A man's emissary is as himself" (Berachot 34b; Kiddushin 41b). Thus despite the lofty spiritual heights that Eliezer reached, he continued to call Abraham his master (Genesis 24:12), meaning that he did not become proud on account of his greatness. It is precisely for this reason that he merited having his words accepted in Laban's house.

We now understand why Abraham made Eliezer take an oath. It was not because Abraham did not trust him, but because he wanted to subtly tell Eliezer that he was still among the accursed, meaning that every blessing he bestowed would only be fulfilled if he faithfully carried out his mission. Therefore when Eliezer actually carried it out, his face began to resemble Abraham's due to his uprightness. That in itself enabled Eliezer to infuse a few thoughts of repentance into Laban's heart. We see a great principle at work here, which is that when a person ignores his own interests for the good of others, Hashem grants him success, just as the Sages have said: "Anyone who prays on behalf of his fellow when he himself needs that very same thing, he is answered first" (Bava Kama 92a). This is why Eliezer succeeded in his mission, even if (by bringing people closer to G-d and having become blessed) he himself was worthy of concluding a marriage between his daughter and Abraham's son. Despite this, Eliezer continued to faithfully carry out his mission and did not take advantage of his spiritual loftiness for personal gain.

Abraham's intention was to arrange a marriage precisely within his own clan – in which a mixture of good and evil existed – not among the descendants of Canaan, who were wicked sinners. In fact Eliezer followed Abraham's path in this respect by disregarding himself and thinking only of how to accomplish his mission in the right frame of mind. Hence in the end he merited leaving the category of the accursed and entering into that of the blessed. This applies not only to shidduchim, but to all things; it pertains to every task we assume. When we are only concerned with the other person's interests and what is good for him, we will be successful. From this we learn a very important principle in all areas of life: A person must not use his position for personal gain. Instead, as soon as he represents someone else, he must fulfill his mission with all the intention it rightfully deserves. We too will eventually be honored if we act as such, though we must not rush things in any way.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Advanced in Days

It is written, "Abraham was old, ba ba-yamim [advanced in days]" (Genesis 24:1).

The number of days that each person will spend on earth is fixed. When a person has lived a long time, he finds himself in a situation that can be described as "gone in days," not "come in days." That being the case, why is it stated that Abraham was ba ba-yamim (literally "come in days")? The Kli Yakar explains that the righteous and wicked see things differently when it comes to youth and old age. The wicked see their youth as being "days of light," since they are strong and can fulfill their desires then. Similarly, for them old age is like the night, since their strength fades and their desires for the pleasures of this world dim because of habitual indulgence. Therefore when the wicked reach old age, "they leave daytime for the night." For the righteous, however, old age is a time of stability and the acquisition of wisdom, which for them is a good time. This is why it is said that the righteous are ba ba-yamim (literally "come in days") when they reach an advanced age. This means that they have attained good days in which they can acquire the fear of Heaven and wisdom.

The Psalmist writes, "Do not cast me off in time of old age" (Psalms 71:9), a statement that Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer explained by an example drawn from the reality of his own time. He said, "Czar Nicholas of Russia used brutal methods in drafting soldiers onto the Russian army. Thus many of his compatriots refused to serve, fleeing or hiding instead of going into the army. Those who were caught were accused of desertion, which was punishable by exile to Siberia. The Czar eventually issued a proclamation to the entire Russian people, declaring an amnesty for everyone who had deserted but would now agree to serve in the army. This proclamation had its intended affect, and many young men and older adults presented themselves for recruitment. Those in charge sorted the draftees rigorously, separating the younger men from the older adults. The latter were then brought together as a group before a military court and charged with desertion. The accused men vehemently protested this violation of the Czar's promise of amnesty, explaining this to the judge in no uncertain terms. However the judge had a smile that betrayed his sense of victory, for he said: 'Now that the young men have been enrolled in the army, they will be granted amnesty on that account. As for you older men, what do we need you for? What benefit can we get from pardoning you?' " Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer went on with his explanation: "A man who returns to Hashem in his youth can serve a purpose, for he will mature and become a man. His repentance balances his sin, for he controls his still very active instincts. Such is not the case with the aged, however, and it is for this reason that we plead: 'Do not cast me off in time of old age.' "

Abraham Arose

It is written, "Abraham arose from the presence of his dead" (Genesis 23:3).

There are some people who, when struck by tragedy, become filled with anger for Hashem and spiritually stumble. As for Abraham, he arose and spiritually elevated himself even when his wife Sarah died. This is what the book Pahad David (Parsha Vayeira) states concerning the verse, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him...to observe the way of the L-RD" (Genesis 18:19). In other words, Abraham remained extremely close to G-d after and despite these trials. The Holy One, blessed be He, personally testified that Abraham did not deviate from His ways.

Machazik or Mazik?

It is written, "Abraham arose and bowed himself to the people of the land, to the children of Chet" (Genesis 23:7).

In former times, the custom was for a yeshiva bachur [young student] to eat his regular meals with the residents of the town in which the yeshiva was located. One day a townsman came to the Chatam Sofer and said, "The bachur who eats with me has no chet." By this he meant that the individual was not really a bachur, but a bour [out] – lacking the letter chet in the word bachur. The Chatam Sofer replied: "If this bachur has no chet, it's not so bad. However if a machazik Torah [supporter of the Torah] has no chet, he then becomes a mazik [destroyer], nothing but an am ha'aretz [ignoramus]. Thus he is not really a machazik, before whom it is even possible to bow, as we see in the Torah when it placed Zebulon before Issachar." Hence it is stated, "Abraham arose and bowed himself to am ha'aretz [the people of the land], to the children of Chet." This means that if a person has the letter chet in his name, we can bow to him even if he is an am ha'aretz [ignoramus]. The same is mentioned in Yalkut HaGershoni.

Eyes for Wealth

It is written, "Rebecca had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran to the man, outside to the fountain" (Genesis 24:29).

Rashi states, "Why did he run and for what did he run? When he saw the nose ring he said, 'This one is rich,' and he made plans to get at his money." The Yesod HaTorah states: "Large strides rob a man of one five-hundredth part of his eyesight [Taaniith 10b]. Therefore why did Laban run? The answer is that he perceived the wealth upon which he had cast his eyes, and he was ready to lose his eyes for that wealth!"

Kindness Clings to Kindness

It is written, "Laban and Bethuel answered and said, 'The matter stemmed from the L-RD! We can say to you neither bad nor good' " (Genesis 24:50).

From where did this piety of Laban and Bethuel originate? When Rebecca's family heard Eliezer recounting stories about her kindness, they were astonished. "From where did she learn such conduct?" they wondered. "It wasn't from us!" However it stemmed from Hashem, which is why she was perfectly suited to travel to Abraham's home, where kindness was also practiced.

A Portion of a Name

It is written, "To the sons of the concubines that Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts. Then he sent them away from Isaac his son while he was still alive, eastward to the land of the east" (Genesis 25:6).

Rashi states, "The concubines.' It is lacking the letter yud, thereby denoting only one concubine, Hagar being identical to Keturah. Wives possess a ketubah, whereas concubines possess no ketubah, as explained in Sanhedrin concerning the wives and concubines of David." Rashi does not explain, however, why the plural form of the word is used (pilagshim, "concubines"), since there was only one concubine, namely Hagar. The Vilna Gaon stated: "It is said regarding every couple that marries, 'When husband and wife are worthy, the Shechinah abides with them' [Sotah 17a]. Why is this so? It is because there is a yud in the word ish [man] and a hei in the word isha [woman], which together form Hashem's Name [Y-H]. Therefore if they are worthy, the Shechinah abides with them." However the Gaon noted that the Name Y-H is only a portion of Hashem's Name. Where is the other part? He replied by saying that it is for this reason that a man gives his wife a ketav (document), obligating him to give her all sorts of things. Why is it called a ketubah? The Sages added V-H to the word ketav in order to form ketubah. All this regards a woman who possesses a ketubah, something that a concubine does not have. Thus a concubine only carries a portion of Hashem's Name, and for this reason she is called pilagshim, meaning peleg shem ("a portion of a name").

If It Can't Help, It Will Still Do Harm!

It is written, "They blessed Rebecca and said to her: 'Our sister, may you come to be thousands of myriads' " (Genesis 24:60).

Rebecca had a brother by the name of Laban, and he blessed her by saying these very words. The Midrash states, "Rabbi Berekiyah and Rabbi Levi said in the name of Rabbi Chama the son of Chanina: Why was Rebecca not remembered [with children] until Isaac prayed for her? So that the heathens might not say, 'Our prayer bore fruit' " (Bereshith Rabba 60:13). In other words, something happens when we receive a blessing from a person who is not worthy of bestowing one. Although we may think, "Even if it can't help, it still can't do any harm," it may be precisely the blessing of someone who is unworthy of bestowing one that will cause great harm. Consider Rebecca, who was barren for 20 years simply because Laban blessed her! Why was that the case? It was in order that no one should say that Laban was a tzaddik who performed miracles! That is, if Rebecca had given birth soon after being blessed by Laban, a thousand people would have lined up outside his door the next day! Hence Hashem closed her womb and she suffered from childlessness for 20 years, all in order to prevent a man like Laban from becoming a professional "tzaddik."

– Aish Dat

The Generations of Israel Among the Nations

It is written, "These are the generations of Ishmael" (Genesis 25:12).

Because the Torah was given to the Jewish people, we must understand what the importance is of teaching Jews about the genealogy of Ishmael. At the beginning of his commentary on Parsha Vayeishev, Rashi states: "Scripture described Esau's settlements and his generations briefly.... It elaborates at length on the settlements of Jacob and his generations, and all the events that brought these about, since they were important to the Omnipresent to dwell upon at length." This means that the Torah is destined for the Jewish people, who were chosen from among all others to receive it. Hence in each passage that describes the descendants of a given individual up until the time of Jacob, the Torah quickly recounts what happened to that individual's descendants, while simultaneously giving an account of those from whom the Jewish people stemmed. For example, before the generations of Adam are discussed near the end of Parsha Bereshith, the offspring of Cain are mentioned, after which the Torah goes on to speak of Noah. At the end of Parsha Noah, the descendants of Noah are described, after which the Torah goes on to speak of Abraham. It then mentions the descendants of Ishmael, followed by the descendants of Isaac. At the end of Parsha Vayishlach, the Torah speaks of the descendants of Esau and then goes on the descendants of Jacob, the Children of Israel.

Overview of the Parsha

Our parsha describes the end of Abraham's era, from the death of Sarah and the marriage of Isaac until Abraham's death. When Sarah died in Hebron in the land of Canaan, Abraham purchased the cave of Machpelah as a gravesite. In his advanced years, Abraham made his servant Eliezer swear to journey to his land and find a wife for Isaac, and he returned with Rebecca. Abraham took Keturah and sent the sons of his concubines to the land of the east, after which he lived a good long life and rejoined his fathers. At the end of Abraham's era, the Torah speaks of the generations of Ishmael and the places where his descendants dwelled, after which it continues with the generations of Isaac.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Perfect Kindness To Family Members

In his book *Ohr HaTzafon*, the Alter of Slabodka states that the kindness a man demonstrates to his wife and family members is the greatest kindness possible, being of the finest quality (given that it is truly wholehearted). Why is this so? The Midrash states, " 'One who pursues righteousness and kindness will find life, righteousness, and honor' [Proverbs 21:21]. 'One who pursues righteousness' alludes to Abraham, as it says: 'That they may observe the way of the L-RD, to do righteousness and justice' [Genesis 18:19]. 'And kindness,' for [Abraham] acted lovingly towards Sarah' (Bereshith Rabba 58:9). According to Rabbi Shemuel bar Yitzchak, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'It is My function to dispense love. Since you have embraced My function, come and wear My raiment.' Thus 'Abraham was old' [Genesis 24:1]" (Bereshith Rabba 59:4).

The Alter of Slabodka expresses his astonishment here, for how could Abraham be described as "one who pursues righteousness" simply because he buried Sarah? Is a man's kindness demonstrated by the fact that he buries his own wife? How could this be, since she is like his own body! Who would not do as much? Even if this action contained an element of kindness, what value did it have compared to Abraham's other, great deeds of kindness? If we examine the issue more closely, however, we will see that even when a person gives all that he has, he has not yet demonstrated complete kindness. This is because the recipient of a kind gesture actually suffers from being supported by other people, this being known as "bread of shame." The Talmud states, "When a person is dependant on others, his face changes [color]" (Berachot 6b). As a result, the more we demonstrate kindness in a way that the recipient does not sense any "bread of shame," the more he will feel comfortable about being helped, and the greater our kindness will be. If we demonstrate kindness in such a way that the recipient no longer requires help from others, this is perfect kindness. For example, when Hashem answers our prayer to have mercy, both spiritually and materially, on someone in need, this is perfect kindness, for a person's help comes from Hashem in that case, not from us. Hence if we demonstrate kindness to our families, the closer the recipient is to us, the less he will feel dependant upon others. It was precisely due to the kindness that Abraham showed his wife (who was like his own body) that he merited the description of "one who pursues righteousness." Of him the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "You have embraced My function." This is because kindness shown to those closest to us is like the kindness that Hashem shows man, who does not sense any "bread of shame."

EISHET CHAYIL

The Cost of Excessive Demands

A woman who walks in the ways of the Torah should be lenient on her husband by not asking him for things he cannot provide. For example, if her husband's means are limited, she should not ask him to act like a wealthy man and buy her things in excess. A woman must not be jealous of others, but instead she should be happy with her lot, whether it be little or much. If she pushes her husband to spoil her as a wealthy man would, he will be forced to borrow in order to make her happy, and in the end he will have to borrow even more to repay his initial loans, which will lead to theft. Creditors will eventually repossess what her husband purchased, and this will bring her far more sorrow than if he had never bought her things to begin with.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi David Lida – The Av Beit Din of Amsterdam

The name of the gaon Rabbi David Lida Zatzal was famous throughout Poland and Lithuania. The son of the gaon Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Zevalin, and the nephew of the gaon Rabbi Moshe Ravkash of Vilna, he learned Torah with the gaon Rabbi Heschel Zatzal, the Av Beit Din and Rav of Lublin and Krakow. When Rabbi Lida began writing *Ir David*, he honored his teacher by beginning his book with a quotation from him.

In his youth, Rabbi Lida served as the Rav of several cities in Poland and Lithuania. He eventually moved to Amsterdam, but there he became embroiled in a dispute with Rabbi Nissan (the brother-in-law of the author of *Nachalat Olamim*) and was forced to leave the city. Rabbi Lida did not give up, however, but instead pleaded his case to rabbis from the Council of the Four Lands. After weighing the issue, the rabbis decided that he should return to Amsterdam and continue to serve as its Rav and Av Beit Din.

Rabbi David Lida made many disciples in every city where he served as Rav, be it in Krakow, Lublin, or Amsterdam. Thousands of people came from all around to ask him questions of Halachah, and it was from his answers that he composed eight books: *Migdal David*, *Ir Miklat*, *Shomer Shabbat*, *Ir David*, *Chalukei Avanim*, *Divrei David*, *Sharbit HaZahav*, and *Sod Hashem*. He received approbations for each of these books from the gaonim of the generation.

Rabbi David Lida's life ended on Heshvan 28, 5455, as his soul departed for the celestial academy. May his merit protect us all.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Like This

It is written, "All his days his father had never saddened him by saying, 'Why have you done this?'" (I Kings 1:6).

This verse speaks of Adonijah, King David's son, who wanted to reign after his father's death. It explains why he was not afraid of his father, and why he did not fear that the Children of Israel would reject his ascension to the throne. Thus we are told, "All his days his father had never saddened him," for King David never asked him, "Why have you done this?" Adonijah therefore believed that everything he did was proper and that he was worthy to reign as king (*Metzudat David*).

In light of this, we note that children often ask questions about matters that do not concern them, or about issues that should not be discussed. When a child asks his father, "Why is it like this?" he may reply by saying, "It's just like this!" However such a response would be a mistake, for it disheartens the child and even increases his curiosity.

We must explain things to a child according to his level of understanding, though obviously with a certain degree of restraint regarding matters that children should not be aware of. Thus the verse states: "All his days his father had never saddened him by saying, 'Madua [why]?' 'Kachah [like this]!' " In other words, King David never saddened his son by telling him that things are just *kachah* ("like this") whenever he asked *madua* ("why"). Instead he answered him according to his degree of intelligence and understanding.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Educating Towards Internalization and Dedication

The Sages praise the greatness of Eliezer the servant of Abraham by saying, "The mere conversation of the servants of the Patriarchs' household is more important than the laws of their descendants" (*Bereshith Rabba* 60: 8). Nevertheless, Abraham did not want Isaac to marry Eliezer's daughter, but rather the daughter of Bethuel, the sister of Laban, whom the Sages tell us were wicked. It seems clear that even if Eliezer's daughter had been as righteous as Rebecca, and even if Rebecca had been as wicked as her father and brother, due to the fact that Eliezer's daughter was not from the family of Bethuel (who stemmed from Terah's family and was a descendant of Shem, not Canaan), it would still have been enough to tilt the balance in favor of Rebecca. Thus Abraham preferred not to focus on Rebecca's father or brother, but on the roots of her upbringing. The gaon Rabbi David Povarsky Zatzal examines the fact that despite the greatness of Eliezer, we have no further mention of him or his descendants, nor do we hear of any disciples that followed in his footsteps.

To explain this, Rabbi Povarsky says that there are different ways of learning and different kinds of greatness. With Abraham, learning wasn't just about finishing tractate *Avodah Zarah*, but about adopting a way of seeing idolatry as a servant of G-d. The greatness of Abraham's conduct came not only from a routine education, but also from the fact that the right way of seeing the world was so deeply rooted in his heart that it was absolutely impossible for him to act otherwise. This ability to internalize concepts and demonstrate devotion also permeated the home of Terah, even if it was for evil intent (as with Nahor, Bethuel, and Laban). However for the righteous members of the family, such as Rebecca, this provided them with a great and completely different character trait. Conversely, in the home of Canaan the inability to internalize concepts and demonstrate devotion to the truth of G-d's word also affected the righteous among them. The fire of G-d's fear did not burn in them as it did within the family of Abraham. Thus for lack of a living example of such a character trait, Eliezer's Torah did not endure beyond his lifetime, even though he learned Torah with his master Abraham in order to teach it to others. Hence it was better for Abraham to enter into a covenant with Bethuel than with Eliezer.

From here we learn that it is not enough for Torah education to simply stress quantity, i.e., studying much and doing many mitzvot. Above all, we must be devoted to the truth of Hashem's word.

A TRUE STORY

Bending Down to Milk an Animal

It is written, "Abraham bowed down before the people of the land" (Genesis 23:12).

With respect to this verse, the Sages of Israel said with a smile: Abraham, who was a righteous and pious man, demonstrated respect and even bowed before the people when he needed a favor from them.

Concerning this subject, it is said that the gaon and author of *Noda B'Yehuda* (Rabbi Ezekiel Landau) was once collecting money for an important cause with a prominent member of the community. When the Rav arrived at the home of a wealthy resident in the area, his companion took hold of his arm and said, "I do not believe that it is proper for the Rav to lower himself by standing before the door of this man, known by everyone in town as being stingy, vulgar, and ignorant." The gaon replied, "We know that man is the pinnacle of creation. However when he has to milk an animal, he bends down before it. I also have no need to worry about my honor in this case."