

SHABBAT PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH · 22 CHESHVAN 5774 - OCT. 26, 2013 · VOL. 21 NO. 5

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE DUST OF GREATNESS

“Come, blessed of G-d” (24:31)

About three hundred years ago in the 1960s there was a TV hairspray commercial whose slogan was, “The closer you get, the better she looks!” Judging by the model’s hairdo, this particular hairspray made motorcycle crash-helmets redundant. (Could be they were pitching their sales at Hell’s Angels?)

It always struck me that the closer you got to the rich and the beautiful, the less and less better they looked.

Unlike the denizens of Hollywood, to whom proximity usually reveals nothing but larger and larger flaws, the privilege of spending time with a true Torah Sage demonstrates the closer you get — the better they look.

Recently we experienced the passing of one of the greatest Rabbis of our age, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, *zatzal*. Listening to the eulogies of this extraordinary man reminded me of the time I met Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zatzal*. The meeting cannot have lasted more than five minutes. My grasp of Hebrew at the time was negligible. However, when I left the room I felt like a different person. It was nothing he had said. He had barely looked at me. It came from merely being in his presence. I left his room with the dust of greatness on me.

The four species of Succot — the palm frond, the etrog, the willow and the myrtle — represent four kinds of Jewish people. The etrog has a beautiful aroma and it tastes good. The etrog symbolizes a Jew who has both Torah and *mitzvot*. The palm tree yields dates, which taste good, but the tree has no aroma. This symbolizes the Jew who has Torah but no *mitzvot*. The myrtle has a beautiful aroma, but it has no taste. This is the Jew who has *mitzvot* but no Torah. And finally, the willow, which has neither taste nor aroma. This is the Jew who has neither Torah nor *mitzvot*. Without this willow, however, one cannot perform the mitzvah of the four species – and without the “willow-Jew” the Jewish People is not the Jewish People. It is not *Klal Yisrael*.

The willow is essential to the wholeness of the Jewish People. By itself, however, it has little or nothing to recommend it. Why then is the lowly willow accorded a special day of its own during Succot on Hoshana Rabba? Why does the willow, the least auspicious of the four species, have its own day? There is no ‘*Etrog Day*’ or ‘*Lulav Day*’ during Succot. What is so special about the willow that it merits its own special day?

Everything in this world recognizes itself by its opposite. A pigmy can never understand what small is until he meets a Watussi giant. And someone on a low spiritual level can only recognize where he is when he meets someone great.

When Lavan saw Eliezer he mistook him for Avraham Avinu. Eliezer was no Avraham Avinu, but to Lavan he was a spiritual giant. Through his encounter with Eliezer, Lavan recognized his own lowliness, and in doing so he was elevated to a point where his words had the power to change reality. For when Lavan said, “Come, blessed of G-d, Eliezer emerged from the curse of being a descendent of Canaan, and became in truth a *baruch*, “blessed.”

The same is true of the willow. By being bound together with the other species and recognizing its lowliness, it is elevated to the point that it has a power of its own, distinct from its role of completing the four species. The discovery of true self that comes through self-effacement and humility makes the willow worthy to have its own day in the festival.

Few things can be more depressing than realizing exactly how low we are spiritually, how far we are from where G-d wants us to be, how far we are from where we ourselves want to be.

And, yet, that “willow moment” can unlock the key to true spiritual power.

• Sources: based on the Kotzker Rebbe quoted by the Shem MiShmuel in his essays on Hoshana Rabba

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels.

(Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

SHEKALIM 9 - 15

"Anyone who lives in Israel, and speaks the holy language (Hebrew), and eats his food in purity, and says the prayer of "Shema" morning and evening is a person worthy of the World-to-Come."

Rabbi Meir teaches this in a *beraita* on our daf and seems to imply that one must do certain special activities in order to merit the World-to-Come. This seems to run counter to the *mishna* in Tractate Sanhedrin that "All of the Jewish People have a share in the World-to-Come." One explanation offered is that the person Rabbi Meir speaks of here will merit the World-to-Come without any trauma of judgment or suffering when he passes from this world to the next (*Korban Ha'Eida*).

• *Shekalim 9b*

"Just as you appeased one who is seen but cannot see, so too may G-d who can see but is not seen accept your appeasement (your prayers)."

This blessing was given by a blind teacher who taught Torah to the son of Rabbi Hoshaya. Rabbi Hoshaya would eat together with the teacher each day, but one day the rabbi had guests and did not eat with him, thereby causing him to feel slighted. Rabbi Hoshaya explained that he ate with the guests for the honor of the teacher — he was concerned that they would embarrass the blind teacher since they did not know of his greatness. As a result, the blind teacher was relieved and appeased, and blessed the rabbi.

• *Shekalim 15a*

Remembering Rav Weinbach

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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l • Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor and Talmud Tips: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand"?
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go"?
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

לעילוי נשמות
מרת אסתר בשה בת ר' משה יחזקאל ע"ה
אשה יראת ה' ובעלת חסד
גלבי"ע ד' מנחם אב תשע"ג
ת.ג.צ.ב.ה

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT CHAYEI SARAH

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

In this week's Torah portion Avraham sends his servant Eliezer on a long journey with a large entourage of men and camels to his family's residence in Haran to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. In order to find the perfect girl, Eliezer devises the following test:

He would stand by a well of water in such a way that it would be easy for him or his men to get water for themselves and their camels. He would then ask the first girl to come by to give him water even though it appeared that he could take care of himself. The normal response to such a request would be, "You are standing by the well. Go ahead and take water yourself." Eliezer, however, was looking for someone with extraordinary perception and generosity, one who would assume that there was some unusual reason for him to make such a request. Perhaps all of the men were totally exhausted or seriously ill, even though they appeared perfectly normal. If she passes this initial test, Eliezer intends to speak to her to find out if she has other necessary traits such as modesty, openness to hosting guests and roots in a G-d-fearing family.

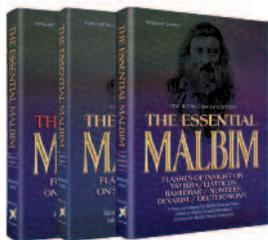
Rivka immediately appears and goes quickly to the well

and Eliezer has to run to meet her. When he reaches her, she has already filled her pitcher and is on the way back to the city. She could have responded, "Why don't you just go to the well yourself?" or "Why didn't you ask me when I was at the well? Now I have to go all the way back to the well!" However, she doesn't question him at all. Rather, she says with great respect, "Drink, my Master." Also, rather than asking him to remove the heavy pitcher from her shoulder, she lowers the pitcher and gives him to drink. Then, completely unsolicited, she offers to take care of not just the camels' immediate thirst, but "until they have finished drinking", knowing full well that camels have an enormous capacity to store water. She was not at all concerned about the difficulty of the job, the delay, or the fact that apparently able-bodied men would sit idly by while she labored. Additionally, Rivka does not say, "I will water your camels." Rather, she says, "I will draw water for your camels." That is to say, 'I don't know if the camels are thirsty or not, but I will nonetheless draw water for them and they will drink if they wish.'

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A WORD ON A WORM

From: Stephan

Dear Rabbi,
Apparently, King David said about himself, "I am a worm and not a man." I don't get this. Was this some form of exaggerated humility? Is it to be understood metaphorically? What was he getting at?

Dear Stephen,

You are correct, King David wrote in Psalms 22:7, "I am a worm and not a man; a reproach of man, despised by peoples." In context, King David describes how his illustrious ancestors, in their time of need, called out to G-d and were saved. Yet he is pursued by his enemies and tread down. He beseeches G-d to rescue him as He did for his forefathers.

According to this, David is simply expressing that he is being treated like a worm and not a human being.

However, this phrase is often interpreted on its own right as an expression of humility. And while it might seem exaggerated, it is compared to similar expressions uttered by other Jewish luminaries such as Abraham who exclaimed, "I am dust and ash" (Gen. 18:27); or Moses and Aaron who posited, "Of what significance are we?" (Ex. 16:7).

Interestingly, considering the spiritual digression that spans the generations, just as Moshe and Aaron describe themselves as something less than Abraham, we should expect David to describe himself as something even less than dust and ashes. This opens the possibility that David was getting at something in particular by comparing himself to a worm.

The significance of a worm may be derived from its use in another verse: "Fear not, O worm of Jacob, the number of Israel; 'I have helped you,' says the L-rd, and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 41:14). Why does G-d compare Israel to a worm? The Talmudic Sages explain that just as the strength of a worm (i.e. caterpillar) is in its mouth, so too Israel's strength lies in their prayers to G-d.

According to this, in the context of David asking G-d for salvation from his oppressors, when he asserts that he's a worm, i.e. a caterpillar, and not a man, he is expressing his complete reliance upon the power of prayer and not on his own limited human strength.

In this vein, another possible explanation is that just as a caterpillar is initially repulsive, but, upon enveloping itself in, and later emerging from, its protective cocoon, its beauty is recognized by all, David is expressing his faith that by entrusting himself in G-d's care he will be liberated and vindicated with magnificence in this world and in the next.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

RABBI CHANINA BEN TRADYON, THE TANA

"All your actions should be directed to Heaven." — Rabbi Yossi in Pirkei Avot 2:12

One should intend to be healthy and strong in order that he should have a spirit capable of knowing G-d, for it is impossible to understand wisdom if one is hungry or ill, or if one of his limbs aches. If he follows this course all his life he is constantly serving G-d, even in his business activities and



his marital relations, for his motive is always to achieve the wholesomeness required to serve G-d. If he sleeps in order to rest his mind and body and so will avoid illnesses that prevent him from serving G-d, his sleep is also considered a positive act of service.

As King Solomon wisely put it: "Know Him in all your ways".

• Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Dayot 3:3

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IS PRAYER A MITZVAH?

The opinion of Nachmanides (the Ramban) regarding prayer is well known. It is found in his work called the “Comments of The Ramban to the “Book of Mitzvot”. He explains that prayer cannot be defined as a Torah obligation. Rather, it is an expression of G-d’s kindness to listen to all who call out to Him in prayer, just as a loving king, in his great mercy, listens to the requests of his people. Perhaps, according to this approach, prayer is *more* than a mitzvah since it represents the essential connection between man and his Creator.

In contrast to this, Maimonides (the Rambam) counts prayer as one of the six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot* of the Torah (Sefer Hamitzvot, mitzvah 5). According to his ruling it is one’s daily obligation to pray to G-d.

One may ask what these two great Torah giants are arguing about. What is the gain or loss (other than the one mentioned above) if we call prayer a command or not?

As in any dialogue, there are two parties involved.

From the perspective of man’s responsibility in the world, prayer as a command teaches a person that he is obligated to express his belief in G-d’s existence by acknowledging G-d as the absolute Ruler of the world, Who governs over all the

details of a person’s life. It follows, therefore, that one who refuses to pray expresses a lack of faith and trust in G-d as Creator and Ruler over the forces of Creation. (Divine Providence is one of the fundamental principles of our faith and is directly connected to the concept of prayer. For further research on this topic, see *Sefer Ha’Ikarim*, Discourse four; chapters 16-18.)

If, however, we look at prayer from G-d’s perspective, we can view it in a different light. Since prayer is a privilege granted to man by G-d in order to appeal to His mercy, it would follow that if a person chooses not to pray, his action would not be defined as a lack of fulfilling his obligation, but rather as a lost opportunity. Although by not praying a person will have lost his chance to gain G-d’s favor through prayer, he, however, would not be considered to have transgressed a positive mitzvah.

A difference between these two approaches would be in a case where someone didn’t pray because he felt absolutely sure that G-d would take care of him. According to the opinion of the Ramban his actions may be deemed praiseworthy, while according to the opinion of Maimonides he will have neglected to fulfill a positive command.

@ OHR *Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students*

by Daniel Keebler

Free Israel Trips Develop into Happy Life

Nadav Steindler Age: 32

Acco, Israel

**UCLA – Major: Computer Science Programmer
Center Alumnus (2003-04)**

An inspiring campus rabbi plus a trip to a yeshiva in Monsey made choosing the Ohr Somayach Birthright trip a no-brainer for Nadav. He even led a second Birthright trip for Ohr Somayach the following summer. All these free and highly inspiring trips to Israel instilled a still-glowing feeling of gratitude to Ohr Somayach in Nadav’s heart.



Nadav then spent a year in the Center program pumping up his Torah-learning muscles before launching himself into an Israeli yeshiva. He says that Ohr Somayach taught him how to learn Talmud with its commentaries, of course, but that what he really gained was a *love* of learning. “It’s hard to teach that,” he says, “you have to pick it up from the atmosphere around you.”

Nadav married a lovely young lady from Har Nof, daughter of Americans, and now works as a computer programmer in Acco (near Haifa). He and his wife moved to Acco as part of a citizen-led program to revitalize the Jewish community there, including its Jewish education. Nadav has “three wonderful kids” and feels truly happy with his lot in life.

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