



Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Chayei Sarah

Jumping Through Hoops

Eliezer was Avraham's faithful attendant and steward. So trusted, that he was sent to find a suitable young woman for his master's son and heir, Yitzchak. Avraham was a well established figure, presiding over a large community; having displayed his valor, skill, and bravery at war, in addition to his considerable generosity and integrity. Finding a match should have been straightforward, albeit a potentially drawn out process.

Yet Eliezer displays anxiety and worry throughout, and seems eager to complete the job as quickly as possible. He prays, as though the onus is entirely on him, as if Avraham and Yitzchak weren't also concerned; his prayer consisted of a request that the intended girl present herself, rather than him searching for potential suitors as was his remit. But why was he so worried?

Years later, when the disguised Yosef instructed his brothers to bring Binyamin before him, Yehuda went to Canaan, and told his father that he would take full responsibility and liability for him, no matter what. This included accidents beyond all control; Yehuda would still be liable. Why add such a condition?

The Sochatchover teaches that when there is no pressure to succeed, a person can give up at the first sign of trouble. Every difficulty takes on epic proportions, and becomes "uncontrollable". But if a person is challenged to succeed, he will persist and somehow manage against the odds. President Kennedy explained the goal of sending a man to the moon: "We choose to go to the moon... not because [it is] easy, but because [it is] hard, because that goal will serve to organize... the best of our energies and skills..." Working at easy things means never having to fail, but it also means never fully testing or exercising one's potential. When a person is forced to work at something hard, he uncovers all kinds of hidden and latent ability that can make the impossible into the achievable.

If Yehudah was charged with being responsible for Binyamin "as best as he could", he might not have stood up to Yosef because an "accident" absolved him. But when charged with returning Binyamin, no matter what, Yehudah knew he had to rise to the challenge. The added responsibility served to bring out the extra reserves of courage and perseverance that otherwise might have lain dormant and untapped.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that for similar reasons, Eliezer had a daughter of marriageable age. Every girl he met could be declined, and on his return, he could pass off his failure as beyond his control, and then subtly note that his daughter was marriageable... Yehudah took full responsibility for Binyamin to account for “uncontrollable” things, and Eliezer feared that his personal biases would disturb his focus. R’ Chaim Brown notes that this explains Eliezer’s sense of urgency, and desire for certainty.

Eliezer knew that when dismissing potential suitors, he would always doubt his motivations for doing so. Eliezer asked for the right girl to present herself to him immediately, and asked for Hashem to remove any need for deliberation. He prioritized his mission so absolutely to the extent that we only find out about his daughter after he completes his task and Rivka has been selected. Ultimately, these efforts not only cleared his conscience, but left Lavan and Besuel with incontrovertible proof that Rivka was meant for Yitzchak.

The eyes can’t see anything if the mind is blind. Perception is so crucial to attitude, and by changing the way you think about things, you’ll change the way you see them. When adversity presents itself, consider that the gauntlet has been lain down, to provide the impetus to force more from you; and watch yourself rise to the challenge.

Only a Little

On Avraham’s return from Akeidas Yitzchak, he finds his wife has died, and he grieves. The Torah tells us that – וַלְבַבְהָ תָהָה – “and he wept for her”. Curiously, the letter ם is much smaller than letters usually are. Why?

The Baal Haturim says that it indicates that he only cried a little, because she was very old. This does not seem complimentary about our great ancestor. How are we to understand that he only wept a little?

Furthermore, consider that Sarah was a righteous woman, and a great prophetess independent of Avraham. Whilst he influenced many people, it was she who taught all the women; she was the first of the matriarchs, all of whom experienced regular miracles. Was it not necessary to weep immensely at the passing of such an important individual; his wife, his love, and partner in building his dream, no less? Contrast this with the passing of Moshe and Aharon, wherein the entire nation paused all regular function for a 30 day mourning period. How are we to understand that Avraham did not greatly mourn his wife?

The Bikurei Avraham explains that the Torah is actually trying to indicate what a remarkable and unique individual Avraham Avinu was. When he got back from the Akeida, only to find his wife had passed, he intuited that it had happened when she’d discovered the true nature of the father and son trip – that he intended to sacrifice their only child. Note the juxtaposition of the Akeida story to the immediately subsequent death of Sarah.

The way the evil inclination works is not just by discouraging before doing a good deed – but even after. In the same way a person can regret and undo sins, they can regret good

deeds too. This is what we pray for protection from in Ma'ariv every day, when we say “ – והסר שטן מלפנינו ומאחרינו” – before and after us. Avraham might have regretted the Akeida, the cause of his wife’s death.

What Avraham did was distance himself from such thoughts – he rationalized her death to himself, as the Ba'al Haturim says, by saying her time had come anyway because ‘she was old’. The Torah records that he wept briefly for his deceased wife, and is indeed a huge praise for Avraham mental fortitude.

All too often, good deeds have a large opportunity cost. The reaction to this invisible problem often lends context and substance to the goodness of the deed itself; it is an assessment of what the deed meant.

On Antagonists

Avraham is blessed by Hashem after the Akeida:

כִּי בָרַךְ אֲבִרְכְּךָ וְהִרְבָּה אֲרֻבָּה אֶת זְרַעְךָ כְּכּוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וּכְחֹל אֲשֶׁר עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּם וַיִּרְשׁ זְרַעְךָ אֶת שְׂעָר אֲיָבִיּוֹ –

I will bless you, and I will greatly multiply your descendants, like the stars of the heavens, and like the sand on the seashore; and your descendants will inherit the cities of their enemies. (22:17)

Years later, Lavan blesses Rivka as she leaves to marry Yitzchak:

וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת רִבְקָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ אַחֲתָנוּ אֵת הַיָּ לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָה וַיִּירְשׁ זְרַעְךָ אֶת שְׂעָר שְׂנָאִיו –

And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, “Our sister, may you become thousands of myriads, and may your seed inherit the cities of those who hate you.” (24:60)

Rashi notes that Lavan is quoting the blessing received by Avraham, that she’d “inherit the cities” of her antagonists.

But the quote is not identical. What is the difference between שְׂנָאִיו אֲיָבִיּוֹ – enemies and שְׂנָאִיו – those who hate you?

R’ Yehoshua Hartman points to where the two are used in conjunction to note the difference.

וַיְהִי בִּנְסֹעַ הָאָרֶץ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לַיהוָה קוּמָה הָרְשָׁעִים וַיִּפְצְאוּ אֲיָבִיבֶיךָ וַיִּנְסּוּ מִשְׂנָאִיֶּךָ מִפְּנֶיךָ –

So it was, whenever the Ark set out, Moses would say, “Arise, Lord, may Your enemies be scattered and may those who hate You flee from You.”

Rashi says that אויביך are enemies who are assembled for battle, and that משנאיך are pursuers.

There is a distinction between an enemy and a pursuer. The word אויב is similar in root to the word אוהב – to love. Both verbs are a result of closeness. A שונא however, is

someone whose hatred transcends proximity, and will pursue.

Eisav is referred to as **שׁוֹנֵא יִשְׂאֵל**, and Yishmael is referred to as **אׁוֹיֵב יִשְׂרָאֵל**, and circumstances on the ground reflect this – if a Jewish State had been set up in Uganda, there would be no problems with the Palestinians and neighbours, inheritors of the mantle of Yishmael – the situation is a result of being together. Conversely, the Nazis had little to do with Jews worldwide, and yet their extermination campaign spanned the globe; truly the definition of **רׁוֹדֵף**.

But how does this insight correlate to the different terminology Rivka and Avraham were blessed with?

R' Hartman explains that at Mt. Moriah, the blessing was to Avraham, for Yitzchak, regarding his Yishmael – the **אׁוֹיֵב**, therefore the pasuk says **שְׁעַר אֲיָבִיּוֹ**. In contrast, Rivka received a bracha that was for Yakov, regarding Esav, and Esav is a **שׁוֹנֵא**, and therefore the pasuk says **שְׁעַר שְׂנְאָיו**.

Breaking The Chain

The Shalshelas is a rare cantor's note, a tremendous literary device, that makes just four appearances in the entire Chumash– in Lech Lecha 19:16; in Chayei Sarah 24:12; in Vayeshev 39:8; and in Tzav 8:23.

In Chayei Sarah, we find that Eliezer, Avraham's most trusted servant, is charged with finding a wife for Yitzchak. He is not allowed to take a wife from Canaan. The Midrash tells us that Eliezer had a daughter and it could have been that he might 'just not have found' a suitable wife outside Canaan. This could have left the path open for his daughter. Nevertheless, Eliezer overcomes any personal attachments and prays that Hashem heed his master's request. This triumph over his own desires is signified by the Shalshelas on the word **אָמַר** – the opening word of his prayer.

In Vayeshev we see the tremendous personal struggle that Joseph had to overcome. Indeed, by running out and leaving his coat behind in the hands of his master's wife, he got himself into more trouble in some ways. But on a personal level, he could not afford to be in the house a moment longer, refusing his master's wife's advances. That very word – **וַיִּמָּאֵן** (and he refused), has a **שְׁלִשְׁלֹת** on it, denoting the breaking of his own potential negative desires.

As for the final appearance – in Tzav – the Midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbenu was the Kohen Gadol until the end of the Miluim, the first week of the Mishkan's use, at which point he had to hand over the position to his brother Aharon (according to various sources, because he had argued at the burning bush). It must have been hard for him. Yet he overcame any personal desires and handed over the baton wholeheartedly. His final act as High Priest was **וַיִּשְׁחַט**... no surprises about the musical note on this word, at the point of his breaking with his own emotion.

Looking back at Lech Lecha, we see from Rashi that the Torah tells us that the angels had to grab hold of Lot because he was tarrying... leaving behind all his possessions. The first word of the Pasuk, which means he hesitated, contains a – שלשלת – he overcame his physical desire for wealth and grabbed reality with both hands... literally.

It is no accident that Shalsheles actually means a chain. Furthermore, if you listen to its sound, it is elongated (3x a – פזר Pazer, another musical note – which is long already), yet comes to an abrupt end, thus breaking the chain. The person it is used about has transcended.

Drinking Problems

When Eliezer enters Aram, searching for a bride for his master's son, he is thirsty, and devises a test to see if a prospective girl is suitable. Rivka offers him a drink, but also to his camels, meeting the terms of his test:

ותאמר שתה אדני ותמהר ותורד כדה על ידה ותשקהו. ותכל להשקותו ותאמר גם לגמליך אשאב עד אם כלו לשתות –

She said, 'Have a drink, sir!' and quickly lowered her jug to her hand and gave him a drink. When she finished giving him to drink, she said, 'I'll also draw water for your camels, until they have finished drinking.' (24:18, 19)

Parenthetically, Devarim 11:15 says, – ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך ואכלת ושבעת – "I shall provide grass in your field for your cattle, and you will eat, and you will be satisfied." The Gemara in Brachos learns from the fact that the Torah addresses animal concerns before human, that one must feed their animals before having a meal.

But what about drinking?

The Sefer Chassidim learns from Rivka's kindness that humans come first – the Torah records the story in a very deliberate way, to delineate the extent of her kindness as a paradigm for the reader. She gave Eliezer to drink, and only afterwards the camels; presumably then, this is conduct we are meant to emulate.

The Shulchan Aruch says that if a person has already made a bracha on food, and before beginning to eat, says something that is of the interests of the meal, it is not an interruption per se, and one would not need to make a new bracha. One of the examples the Shulchan Aruch gives is that one asks someone else to feed his animals. This too is considered part of the requirements for his own meal, as his own meal is not allowed to begin until they are fed, as the Gemara says one must feed their animals before sitting down to eat.

The Magen Avraham contrasts this with drinking. If someone asked a friend to give his animals a drink, one might have to make a new bracha, as it was interrupted. This is based on the Sefer Chassidim's observation of Rivka's kindness, that since humans come before

animals regarding drinking, it would not be in the interests of the meal underway to discuss giving animals a drink first.

The Yad Ephraim points out that there may be a better proof to that regarding drinking humans come before animals, from when Moshe drew water from the rock for the Jews in the desert:

– והוצאת להם מים מן הסלע והשקית את העדה ואת בעירם
 You shall bring forth for them water from the rock, and give drink to the assembly and to their animals. (20:8)

This proof is presumed better since it was happened after Sinai.

The Ohr HaChaim rejects both instances, since both are cases where the people were particularly thirsty. Under such circumstances, it is obvious that the humans would quench their thirst before addressing their animals needs. However, had they been, under normal circumstances there is no difference between food and drink; animals come first.

Others are bothered with the Sefer Chassidim's halacha for a simpler reason. How can we learn laws regarding one's conduct towards their animals from Rivka, when the animals concerned didn't belong to her?

It is obvious that the halacha to take care of animals first is only if belong to you. There is no notion that one would have to feed every stray cat on the block before sitting down for lunch. So Rivka did not actually have a duty to give the camels to drink, and naturally, she gave Eliezer first. And as part of her great altruistic characteristics, she gave the camels too, meeting the conditions of his test. But how is this story a proof for who drinks first between man and animal?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the halacha is not like the Sefer Chassidim, and animals come first for food and drink. He explains Rivka's actions based on the Gemara Bava Metzia, that one can be transfer a small gift verbally just by saying so. There is no requirement for a physical handover for the transfer to take effect. That is why she said, "Drink, my lord," and quickly gave him to drink even before mentioning giving to camels to drink. She had been transferred just enough water to him to quench his own thirst, but no more, in order to insure that he was not required to give to the camels. Had she said, "I will give you and your camels to drink," Eliezer would have taken enough water for himself and the camels, and would have had to give the camels first, despite his thirst. In other words, Rivka chose her words wisely in order to insure that Eliezer got before the camels.

The Ksav Sofer uses, the Chasam Sofer, his father's, interpretation to illuminate Moshe's action. Why was it necessary for Hashem to tell Moshe – והשקית "give the people to drink"? It should have been sufficient to produce water; once released from the rock, wouldn't the people have been perfectly capable themselves?

The Ksav Sofer answers that if that had transpired, then every individual would have drawn water themselves, necessitating they give their animals first. In order to ensure that the people quench their thirst first, Hashem instructed Moshe that he was to give them to drink. Meaning that the water was in Moshe's possession, as the supplier. Thereby they were not required to give their animals first. After their thirst was quenched, they were allowed to have more for their animals. Clearly, the Chasam Sofer and the Ksav Sofer did not learn the pasukim as the Sefer Chassidim did.

In defense of the Sefer Chassidim, Rav Moshe Feinstein indicates that Rivka was obligated to do tzedaka towards Eliezer. Her requirement was to act in the form that Eliezer himself would have had to do. Meaning, had Eliezer drawn his own water, he would have had to give the camels first due to his obligation toward the animals (if you disagree with the Sefer Chassidim), similarly then when Rivka was to give water to Eliezer, she was to distribute it the same way he would have. Her mitzvah of tzedaka toward Eliezer required her to dispense his obligations in the correct order. That is, to give to the camels first, despite the fact they were not her own. Since we see that she instead gave to Eliezer first, the Sefer Chassidim deduced from here that man comes before animal.

R' Moshe Feinstein notes that question that arises from this is let alone the camels were not Rivka's, they weren't Eliezer's either! They belonged to his master Avraham. Inasmuch as the halacha did not apply to him, how could Rivka be fulfilling her obligation via his obligation if he didn't have such an obligation to begin with? The answer seems to be that all the duties of feeding animals are incumbent not on the legal owner of the animal, but rather to the one responsible out the feedings. Eliezer, although not the legal owner, was entrusted with their care. It was therefore his duty to the camels, and thus Rivka's requirement to act accordingly; and therein, a legitimate source for a Halacha, and not just a story about kindness.

The same concept explains Moshe's actions. It was Moshe's duty to give the Jews to drink, congruent to their very own obligation towards their animals. Thus, by first giving the people to drink and only then to their animals, we see that when it comes to drinking, man comes before animals.

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