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by Shlomo Katz

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**The Parness Family
on the yahrzeits of their fathers
on the yahrzeit of Max Parness a"h**

**Sarah and David Maslow
in memory of their fathers Archie Maslow a"h (18 Marcheshvan)
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Chayei Sarah

We read in this parashah that before Rivkah left her family to marry Yitzchak, they blessed her (24:60), "Our sister, may you come to be thousands of myriads, and may your offspring inherit the gate of its foes." Some commentaries observe that Hashem placed these words in the mouths of Rivkah's relatives. Just as Hashem had sent His angel to bless Avraham in the past, so He sent Rivkah's family to bless her, these commentaries say.

R' Zvi Hirsch Schloss z"l (19th century) writes: Whether Hashem directly influenced Rivkah's relatives to say these words or whether the relatives said them of their own accord, we attribute importance to these words because Hashem made them a part of the Torah. Everything in the Torah is a prophecy which speaks to us. Just as we do not attribute importance to Bil'am's prophecies merely because Hashem placed the words in Bil'am's mouth, but rather because they are part of the Torah, so it is here. [Ed. Note: The gemara (Bava Batra 14b) states, "Moshe wrote the Torah and the prophecy of Bil'am." What does this mean? Is not the prophecy of Bil'am a part of the Torah? One answer is that the gemara wishes to emphasize that the importance of Bil'am's prophecy does not come from the fact that Bil'am said it, but rather from the fact that the Torah repeated it. (Compare Shnei Luchot Ha'berit, Parashat Balak)]

Why does the Torah relate the blessing to Rivkah through the mouths of Rivkah's relatives? R' Schloss explains: The message here is that Rivkah's descendants would one day inherit the land where her relatives lived. That land was Aram (Syria), and the prophecy came true when King David captured that land many centuries later. Through King David's battles, Syria became a part of Eretz Yisrael; nevertheless, just as Rivkah's relatives were impure, so Syria never achieved the same level of sanctity as the rest of Eretz Yisrael. (Thus, for example, the laws of tithing are more lenient in Syria than they are in Eretz Yisrael.)

(Niflaot Mitorat Hashem p.28)

An Astonishing Midrash

"Sarah died in Kiryat Arba" (23:2) from here we know that Adam spoke Aramaic.

R' Shimshon Ostropoli z"l explains: The pasuk implies that the place was already called Kiryat Arba/"The city of the four" when Sarah died. Who named it so? Presumably Adam [for the gemara says that Hashem showed him every place where towns would be built by his descendants]. The word "kiryah" is Aramaic for "city"; therefore, Adam apparently spoke Aramaic.

(Quoted in Binat Nevonim)

"Sarah's lifetime was 100 years, 20 years and seven years;
the years of Sarah's life." (23:1)

Rashi comments: All of her years were equal in their goodness.

Certainly Sarah's years were not equal in their goodness in a material sense, as she longed for a child until she was 90 years old and she had other troubles, such as those with Pharaoh and Avimelech. R' Aharon Lewin z"l (20th century) explains Rashi's comment as follows:

Every person has ups and downs in his life, and both the "ups" and the "downs" can have a negative

impact on his spiritual well-being. When a person experiences troubles, he may be unable to serve Hashem because he is depressed. On the other hand, when a person experiences great success, he may become haughty and thus fail to serve Hashem.

However, this is not the Torah's way. On the verse (Michah 6:8), "Walk humbly with your G-d," Chazal comment: "This refers to assisting a bride and accompanying the deceased." R' Lewin explains that one's relationship to Hashem should be the same whether he is at a wedding or at a funeral.

Rashi is teaching us that Sarah's service of Hashem was not negatively affected by her experiences, either good or bad. For all of her years, her service of Hashem was equal in goodness.

The midrash says that R' Akiva once noticed that his students were dozing off. In order to awaken them, he said, "What did Esther see in order to rule over 127 nations? She saw that Sarah lived 127 years." R' Lewin explains: Esther, in her lifetime, experienced the humbling feeling of being an orphan and a foster child, and she also experienced the heady feeling of being empress of the Persian Empire. How did she maintain her equanimity? She learned the above lesson from studying Sarah's 127 years.

How was this statement calculated to awaken R' Akiva's students? R' Akiva lived at a low point in Jewish history, having seen both the destruction of the Temple and the crushing of Bar Kochva's rebellion. The nation was dozing off, i.e., it was becoming lax in its observance because of a collective state of depression. It was from this state that R' Akiva sought to awaken his students with these words.

(Hadrash V'ha'iyun, ch.87)

The gematria of "va'yihyu chaye Sarah"/"Sarah's lifetime was" equals the gematria of "Kulan hem shavin letovah"/"They were all equal in their goodness."

(Torat Hachida)

"Avraham was old, well on in years, and Hashem blessed Avraham with everything. Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household who ruled over all that was his . . ." (24:1-2)

The midrash states: "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything" means that he placed Avraham in control of his inclinations. "His servant . . . who ruled over all that was his" means that he (the servant, Eliezer) ruled over his inclinations.

How is it possible, asks R' Yisrael Salanter z"l, that Eliezer ruled over his inclinations, while Avraham had to be given this control as a gift? He explains as follows:

There are two approaches that a person can take to avoid being enticed by his evil inclinations. One

approach is to suppress one's evil inclinations entirely; the other approach is to put those inclinations to good use. [For example, a person who is obsessed with material belongings can improve himself by suppressing his desires and choosing to live in poverty, or he can improve himself by putting his desires to good use, i.e., gathering wealth so that he can have the wherewithal to help others.]

What is the difference between the person who adopts one approach and the person who adopts the other approach? R' Yisrael Salanter explains that a person who continually suppresses his inclinations can face any challenge, whereas a person who molds his inclinations so that they can be put to good use will be "out of shape" -- he will have forgotten how to fight by the time he is faced with an unusually great challenge. On the other hand, the person who has molded his inclinations and put them to good use will have "made something" of himself, while the other person will not have done so.

Eliezer was the first type of person. He suppressed his evil nature and behaved in a manner befitting a member of Avraham's household. He "ruled over all that was his."

Avraham, on the other hand, was the second type of person. He attempted to use his natural inclinations for good and he succeeded, thus developing many unusually good traits. As a result, however, he lacked the ability to suppress his inclinations when necessary; therefore, this ability was given to him as a gift, as the above midrash indicates.

(Ohr Yisrael, ch.30)

R' Donash ben Lavrat z"l born approx. 920 - died approx. 980

Also known as R' Adonim Halevi, R' Donash was a grammarian and paytan (liturgical poet). His works include the Shabbat song Dror Yikra and Dvai Hasair, the (now) traditional preface to birkat hamazon at weddings. It is not known where he was born, but he studied in Baghdad under Rav Saadiah Gaon, who may have been his uncle.

Expert in the rules of Hebrew grammar and the meaning of obscure Hebrew terms, R' Donash often disagreed with R' Saadiah and even wrote a work, Teshuvot Al R' Saadiah Gaon, disputing many of his teacher's definitions. In another work, R' Donash lists approximately 200 instances in which his understanding of word roots and definitions clashes with those given in the Machberet of his contemporary, R' Menachem ben Saruk. Rashi frequently quotes R' Donash, and R' Avraham Ibn Ezra lists him among the "Elders of the Holy Tongue."

R' Donash has been called the father of Sephardic Hebrew poetry. He borrowed certain forms from Arabic poetry, for which he was criticized by R' Menachem. (This criticism appears to have been connected to their disagreement over the relationship of Hebrew to Arabic. R' Menachem disagreed with the conventional wisdom that Hebrew and Arabic words share common etymologies.) R' Donash

also was among the first poets of note to write secular poetry in Hebrew. (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim p.51-53; Shem Hagedolim, Ma'arechet Aleph No. 115)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
