

PRIORITIES IN ORDER

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Today's Learning:
Machshirin 6:1-2
Orach Chaim 10:7-9
Pesachim 90
Yerushalmi Pesachim 57

Most of this week's parashah is taken up by the story of Eliezer's search for a wife for Yitzchak. Regarding this, R' Dr. Shlomo Breuer z"l (son-in-law and successor to R' Samson R. Hirsch z"l) writes:

We note particularly the care with which Avraham defines the choice of a wife for his son. Above all, he requires Eliezer to swear not to select a wife for Yitzchak from among the daughters of Canaan.

R' Breuer continues: What a vivid contrast between this action of Avraham and the manner in which we often relate to matters which concern our Judaism. The wise King Shlomo says (paraphrased from Mishlei 2:4): If only you were to seek the Divine words as you seek money. If only you would devote the attention to detail given to the acquisition of material goods and values, also to the most valuable of all possessions, the Torah. Or, in the words of one Talmudic sage (Berachot 28b), "Would that you would fear G-d as you fear men."

How careful we are, how conscientious, when our physical well-being is involved! We try to avoid any action that could be the least bit damaging to our aspirations and undertakings, and we are very eager not to endanger that which we have acquired with such effort. Yet how little attention do we give to the most sacred matters of life, the practice of the Divine-willed duties? How careful are we about entrusting our business or credit to our fellow man? R' Breuer queries rhetorically. Yet, he observes, in matters of kashrut, how often are we satisfied with any kosher label or with vague and indecisive information which suffices to allow us to eat in peace? How easily do we trust unknown dealers of tefilin or mezuzot with the result that we recite hundreds of berachot in vain? And, when it comes to marriage of our children, how careful are we - and rightly so - to investigate the income and health of the prospective mate, yet when it comes to investigating his Jewishness - in thought and deed - we often exhibit an irresponsible attitude.

Let us instead learn from Avraham. (Chochmah U' Mussar p.63)

"Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron . . ." (23:2)

The midrash states that Chevron has four names: "Chevron", "Kiryat Arba", "Mamre" and "Eshkol." R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l (see page 4) explains that all of these names come from the fact that Adam is buried there, and he elaborates as follows:

"Kiryat Arba"/"The City of Four" refers to the fact that Adam was an amalgamation of the four building blocks of the universe: fire, wind, water and earth.

"Chevron" (from "chibbur"/"connection") refers to the fact that Adam connected his soul to G-d.

"Mamre" (from "le'hamir"/"to rebel") alludes to Adam's rebellion against G-d (when he ate from the etz ha'daat).

Finally, the name "Eshkol" recalls that Hashem does not punish a righteous person for any sinful thoughts if he does not, in fact, sin. [Adam, however, did sin. Note that R' Yitzchak offers a lengthy explanation of how the name Eshkol relates to this idea.]

Why does our verse mention only two of the four names, "Kiryat Arba" and "Chevron"? Because only those two relate to Sarah, whose death and burial are described here. She, like Adam, was made of the four building blocks and she, like Adam, was close to G-d. However, she never rebelled against Hashem and she was perfectly righteous and never had a sinful thought. (Peh Kadosh)

Rashi writes that Chevron is called "Kiryat Arba"/"The City of Four" because of the four giants who lived there and because of the four couples (Adam/Chava, Avraham/Sarah, Yitzchak/Rivka, Yaakov/Leah) who are buried there. Maharal (16th century) comments:

The fact that there were four giants living in Chevron indicates that that place was especially suitable for nurturing people of physical stature. Since the physical nature of a place alludes to the

spiritual nature of the corresponding place in Heaven, it is appropriate that four (couples of) spiritual giants should rest in Chevron. (Gur Aryeh)

"Grant me an estate for a burial site with you, that I may bury my dead from before me."
(23:4)

If at first Avraham asked that a burial site be granted to him, why did he later insist on paying for it? R' Yochanan Luria z"l (died 1577) explains as follows:

Just as Avraham was pleased to perform kindness for others, he believed that it would please others if he received kindness from them. Of course, Avraham's request from them was minimal; he asked only for a burial place for Sarah - "that I may bury my dead (singular) from before me."

They answered him, "In the choicest of our burial places (plural) bury your dead," i.e., they offered him a family plot for his descendants. However, they immediately followed this my saying, "Any one (singular) of us will not withhold his burial place (singular) from you." Seeing the size of their offer decline, Avraham realized that their kindness was not sincere, and he offered to pay for Sarah's burial place.

In contrast, R' Luria continues, a person who is sincerely kind always delivers more than he offered. Thus, in last week's parashah, Avraham offered the angels bread, but he brought them also cheese and meat. Similarly, in this week's parashah, Eliezer asks Rivka for a drink of water and she promptly offers to water his camels as well.

R' Luria adds: This is why Avraham made very clear (in verse 13) that he was buying the entire field of Efron, not just the burial cave. The halachah states that a seller is presumed to be generous, i.e., if a person sells a plot of land which is surrounded on all sides by the seller's field, we presume that the seller intends to give the buyer a right-of-way to his plot. However, this is only a presumption. Where, as here, the seller has demonstrated his stinginess, the presumption might not apply. (Meshivat Nafesh)

"They called to Rivka and they said to her, 'Will you go with this man?'
"She said, 'I will go'." (24:58)

The midrash states that because of this response, Bnei Yisrael merited to leave Egypt with great wealth. Why? R' Moshe Teitelbaum shlita (the current "Satmar Rebbe") explains as follows:

Why did Rivka agree to go with Eliezer immediately rather than fulfilling her family's request that she delay? After all, the gemara (Ketubot 57a) states that a bride is entitled to twelve months to prepare her trousseau!

The answer is that Rivka heard from Eliezer that he had miraculously arrived in Charan on the same day that he left Be'er Sheva. Why had this occurred? The gemara (Yoma 28b) teaches that Eliezer was an instructor in Avraham's yeshiva; perhaps this miracle occurred because Eliezer could not bear to be away from learning and teaching Torah. And, seeing this, Rivka did not wish to delay Eliezer's return, and she willingly gave up her trousseau in order to hasten his journey.

Rivka set an example for her descendants when it comes to setting priorities between material possessions and Torah study. Because of her example and as a reward for her actions, it was possible for Bnei Yisrael to have wealth and not be distracted from Torah study by that wealth. To the contrary, Bnei Yisrael willingly gave of their wealth to build the mishkan. (Beirach Moshe)

"The servant told Yitzchak all the things that he had done. And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and he married Rivka . . ." (24:66-67)

Onkelos writes: "And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother, and he saw that her deeds were good like those of his mother Sarah, and he married Rivka." In other words, comments R' Velvel "Brisker" Soloveitchik z"l (died 1959), despite hearing of the numerous miracles that Eliezer experienced - he made the round trip to and from Charan in one day; Rivka's father, who opposed the match, died, etc. - Yitzchak did not marry Rivka until he saw that her deeds were like those of his mother, Sarah. (Chiddushei Ha'Griz)

R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l

R' Yitzchak was the son of, and successor to, R' Chaim of Volozhin, founder and head of the yeshiva of Volozhin. He was born in 5540 (1879/80) and died in 5609 (1848/9).

In addition to his duties as rabbi and rosh yeshiva, R' Yitzchak was a leading spokesman for Jewish causes. It is said that he won the respect of the Russian Czar through the following discussion:

The Czar asked R' Yitzchak, "I know that the Jews pray for my welfare on every Shabbat, and I even asked a Jew to translate the prayer for me. However, now I have learned that the Jews in every country recite the identical prayer for their own ruler. If the Jews in my kingdom pray for my success and the Jews in my rival's kingdom pray for his success, what will be the outcome?"

R' Yitzchak replied with a smile, "Since your majesty had the prayer translated, you certainly noticed that it refers to G-d as 'The One Who makes a path in the sea and a lane in the fierce waters.' Why?

"The answer is as follows: A ship that wishes to travel westward needs an east wind to blow. On the other hand, a ship which must travel eastward needs a west wind. How can both ships be satisfied?

"Hashem's greatness is that He can satisfy both! So, too, we pray for your success while our brothers

in other lands pray for the success of their king, and Hashem's greatness is such that He can answer both prayers."

On another occasion, R' Yitzchak presented himself to a Russian official wearing his Shabbat clothes. The official taunted him, "Doesn't Mishlei (25:6) say, 'Do not beautify yourself before the king'? Furthermore, doesn't the Talmud (Chagigah 9b) say, 'Poverty looks nice on Jews'?"

R' Yitzchak responded, "One of your questions answers the other. Poverty looks nice on the Jews, but when I come before the king I may not beautify myself. Therefore, I have removed my poverty and dressed up in fine clothes."

R' Yitzchak was known for avoiding lashon hara and never speaking ill of another person. Once, when he had no choice but to say that someone had lied, he refused to say it directly. He said, "This person has a phenomenal memory. Some people remember things that happened ten years ago. Others can remember things that happened fifty years ago. This man's memory is so phenomenal that he can remember things that never happened."

R' Yitzchak's works include Mili D'Avot on Pirkei Avot and a Torah commentary entitled Peh Kadosh. Among his sons in law was R' Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the "Netziv"). (Source: Gedolei Hadorot 585-586)

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