

IT'S ALL A BLESSING

by Shlomo Katz

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Edited by Shlomo Katz

Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

Chayei Sarah

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Today's Learning:

Orlah 2:9-10

Orach Chaim 186:1-187:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chagigah 2

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 10

Siddur Avodat Yisrael writes that there is a chapter of Tehilim which corresponds to each parashah--this week Psalm 45. One connection to the parashah is verse 14, which serves as a fitting eulogy for our Matriarch, Sarah (who is buried in this week's parashah). That verse is, "The complete glory of the princess is within; surpassing golden settings is her raiment." Chazal tell us that this verse describes the inborn modesty of Jewish women. Sarah, in particular, is praised in the Torah for practicing this trait. (See Bereishit 18:9 and Rashi there.)

R' Samson R. Hirsch z"l writes that this entire chapter of Tehilim is an ode in honor of an unspecified marriage. The marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah is the predominant theme in our parashah.

Our parashah tells us that after the deaths of Avraham and Sarah, Hashem found their son Yitzchak

to be a fitting successor. As R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (father of the Shelah Hakadosh) wrote in his will: "Fortunate are children who present themselves with alacrity to obey the words of their parents, and whose parents rebuke them and teach them to fear G-d and to occupy themselves with Torah and mitzvot. Regarding the likes of them we read (verse 17 of our chapter of Tehilim), 'Succeeding your fathers will be your sons; you will appoint them as leaders throughout the land'." (Yesh Nochalin)

"She said, "Drink, and I will even water your camels." (24:46)

"He gave straw and feed for the camels . . . Food was set before him." (24:32-33)

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (1150-1217) writes: If one is faced with a thirsty person and a thirsty animal, the person should be given to drink first. This is learned from the first verse above. We read similarly (Bemidbar 20:8), "You shall give drink to the assembly and to their animals."

However, continues R' Yehuda, when it comes to food, the order is the reverse, as we read in the second and third verses above. It also is written (Devarim 11:15), "I shall provide grass in your field for your cattle and [then] you will eat." (Sefer Ha'chassidim No. 531)

What is the reason for this distinction? R' Ephraim Zalman Margaliot z"l (Poland; 1761-1828) explains that one never knows whether the only merit by which he is kept alive is that he cares for animals. Accordingly, one must feed his animals before he feeds himself. On the other hand, one who does not drink when he is thirsty may be endangering his life. Therefore, one should drink before he gives drinks to his animals. (Yad Ephraim, O.C. 167)

"Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." (24:1)

R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita writes: This means that Avraham viewed everything that he had as a blessing. Many people have lots of belongings but they are not happy with what they have. Some feel that they do not have enough wealth, while others feel that the specific types of wealth they have are not bringing them happiness. Avraham did not have these feelings; he was content with everything he had.

King David wrote (Tehilim 34:11), "Those who fear Hashem will not lack anything good." The verse does not say that the righteous will possess everything, R' Sternbuch observes (citing R' Yishayah Horowitz, the Shelah Hakadosh). Rather, King David teaches that the righteous will not feel that anything is lacking because they will be content with what they have. (Ta'am Va'daat)

Comforting Mourners

"Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and li'vkotah/to cry for her." (23:2)

In the Torah, the word "li'vkotah" is written with a small letter "kaf". In this way, the Torah tells us that Avraham did not cry or mourn excessively for his wife Sarah.

R' Ovadiah Yosef shlita (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel and one of the foremost living halachic authorities) elaborates as follows: Our patriarch Avraham was a prophet. When Sarah died, Avraham knew that she was in Gan Eden with other righteous people who had died. Since the sages teach, "One hour in Olam Haba is more worthwhile than all life in This World/Olam Ha'zeh," Avraham had no reason to cry.

Then why did he cry at all? Only because of "what people would say." In reality, though, we all should recognize that the deceased is in a better place. This is why we comfort mourners with the words: "Hamakom ye'nachem etchem . . ."/"May Hashem (who we refer to as "Makom" because He is everywhere) comfort you . . ." The word "makom" literally means "The Place" - thus we are saying, "May your knowledge that the deceased is in a good place comfort you." (Mi'shiurei HaRishon L'Zion p. 152) (Contributed by Daniel Dadusc)

"It was after the death of Avraham that G-d blessed Yitzchak his son . . ." (25:11)

Rashi writes (quoting Tractate Sotah 14a): Hashem offered Yitzchak the consolation that one offers to mourners.

R' Gavriel Zinner shlita notes that this is the earliest reference in the Torah to comforting mourners. Some say that the mitzvah has the status of a Torah commandment, but Rambam holds that it is only a rabbinic mitzvah (with a hint in the Torah).

It is written that when a person who has frequently comforted mourners himself dies, Hashem says to the angels who are appointed over consolation, "Take his soul to the Garden of Eden, to joy and gladness, and comfort it." Since this person comforted mourners during his lifetime, Hashem rewards him measure-for-measure because he has adopted one of Hashem's attributes. [Where do we see that this is one of Hashem's attributes?] It is written (Yishayah 51:12), "It is I, I am He Who comforts you." (Nit'ei Gavriel: Nichum Aveilim p. 366)

Letters from Our Sages

The following is paraphrased from the letters of R' Chaim David Halevi z"l (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv). In the letter, published in Aseh Lecha Rav, IV, No. 7, R' Halevi builds upon the concept presented by Ramban (13th century), based on the midrash, that all of the events described in the Book of Bereishit foreshadow the history of the Jewish people ("ma'aseh avot siman la'banim").

Why does the Torah devote so much space to the purchase of the Me'arat Hamachpelah"? Ibn Ezra offers two answers, one of which is that it demonstrates the fulfillment of Hashem's promise that

Avraham would acquire the land of Eretz Yisrael.

Was this Hashem's promise? To the contrary, Avraham paid a fortune in silver coins to purchase Sarah's burial plot!

With hindsight, and keeping in mind the lesson of "ma'aseh avot siman la'banim," we can appreciate Ibn Ezra's explanation. The current resettlement of Eretz Yisrael began, like Avraham's settlement before it, not with military conquest, but with the purchase of land at often inflated prices.

The midrash notes that there were three sites in Eretz Yisrael which our ancestors purchased at or above full market value: the burial place of the patriarchs in Chevron (by Avraham), the burial place of Yosef in Shechem (by Yaakov), and the site of the Bet Hamikdash in Yerushalayim (by King David). What is the importance of this fact? It is significant because of the halachah that military conquest cannot extinguish private property rights. Hashem knew, of course, that in our day these three sites - Yerushalayim, Chevron, and Shechem - would be inhabited by non-Jews who would call us thieves. This is why He caused our ancestors to buy these three sites for money, thus sealing forever our claim to them. This is also why the Torah describes the purchase of Me'arat Hamachpelah in such detail.

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