

HONOR VERSUS WEALTH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayera

Honor Verses Wealth

Sponsored by

Rabbi and Mrs. Sam Vogel and family

in memory of

father and grandfather

Aharon Yehuda ben Yisroel a"h (Leon Vogel)

The Katz family

in memory of

Avraham Abba ben Yitzchak Zvi Hakohen Katz a"h

and Hersch Noach Spalter a"h

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on the yahrzeits of

grandmother and great-grandmother, Chaya Sarah Tarshish a"h

mother-in-law and grandmother, Chana Dimont a"h

father and grandfather Rabbi Elazar Tarshish a"h

David and Sarah Maslow and family

in memory of

his father Archie Maslow a"h (18 Cheshvan)

and her father Samuel Holstein a"h (25 Cheshvan)

Today's Learning:

Temurah 3:2-3

O.C. 224:4-6

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 38

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 22

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (11:16-17), "The woman of grace upholds honor, but the insolent uphold wealth. A man of kindness does good for himself, but a cruel person troubles his flesh." Rabbeinu

Yonah z"l (Spain; 1180-1263) explains: Even when a man is not wealthy, his wife supports and upholds his honor through her hard work, as it is written (Mishlei 31:23), "Her husband is distinctive in the councils, when he sits with the elders of the land." [By referring to the man as "Her husband," King Shlomo implies that the wife deserves credit for the man's distinction.] In contrast, there are some people, referred to in the verse as "the insolent," who have no hope of achieving power and distinction unless they first obtain wealth.

R' Yonah continues: "A man of kindness does good for himself" also contrasts with the "insolent" who seek wealth. It refers to one who cares for his body and soul by enjoying this world's pleasures in moderation. The Torah does not frown upon eating, drinking and other pleasures, when done in moderation. However, "a cruel person troubles his flesh" by not exercising appropriate restraint.

Alternatively, R' Yonah writes, the verses from Mishlei are related to our parashah: "The woman of grace upholds honor" refers to Sarah. [It appears from what follows that R' Yonah may now be reading the verse, "The woman of grace will be upheld by honor."] Both this week's and last week's parashot are replete with events that give honor to Sarah - G-d punishes Pharaoh on her account, an angel appears to Hagar to command her to return to Sarah, angels come to foretell that Sarah will give birth, G-d punishes Avimelech on her account, and, finally, G-d tells Avraham that Sarah is his superior in prophecy. (Derashot U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah Al Ha'Torah)

"He lifted his eyes and saw: Behold! three men were standing over him. He saw, so he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and bowed toward the ground. He said, 'My Master, if I find favor in Your eyes, please pass not away from Your servant'." (18:2-3)

Rashi z"l explains: He asked G-d to wait for him while he ran and invited the travelers.

Based on Avraham's actions, our Sages teach that hosting guests is greater than "receiving the face of the Shechinah." But why is this so? R' Baruch Shalom Ashlag z"l (1907-1991; chassidic rebbe in Israel) explains:

Man's task in this world is to serve Hashem without thought of reward or glory. This means that, at every moment, one must ask himself: What does G-d expect of me right now? Often, we ask ourselves this question, but we arrive at the wrong conclusion. We fail to recognize what G-d wants of us, writes R' Ashlag, because we assume that we are meant to be doing glorious deeds for Hashem, not the simple or mundane tasks that actually need to get done.

Avraham did not make this mistake. He understood that even when one is in the middle of the most glorious service, actually engaged in conversation with G-d, the task of the moment might be something else, something as mundane as offering hospitality to Arabs. It is this challenge which makes the "lesser" mitzvah (hospitality) the "greater" mitzvah. (Birkat Shalom 5745 No. 5)

"What if there are fifty righteous people in the midst of the city? Would You still stamp it out rather than spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people within it?" (18:24)

R' Yechezkel Abramsky z"l (1886-1976; Av Bet Din of London, later a rosh yeshiva in Israel) asks: If these fifty tzaddikim did exist, did they have any positive influence on the people of Sdom? Why should the city be saved on their account?

He answers: There are tzaddikim who are actively engaged with their neighbors and perform outreach or otherwise influence the community in public ways. There are other tzaddikim who closet themselves in their rooms and are never noticed by their communities. Even the latter group raises the spiritual standing of its neighbors although it is not felt in any overt way.

How do we know this is true? Rambam writes (Hil. Yesodei Ha'Torah, ch.7) that there are two types of nevi'im / prophets. Some nevi'im carry prophecies to their communities. However, other nevi'im prophesy to themselves only in order to raise their own spiritual awareness. Asks R' Abramsky: the word "navi" literally means "spokesman." How can someone be called a "spokesman" when he never speaks to anyone but himself? The answer is that even the silent navi, even the hidden tzaddik, speaks volumes to his surroundings through his unspoken words and his unheralded actions. (Heard from R' Gedaliah Anemer shlita, 11 Marcheshvan 5769)

"For we are about to destroy this place . . ." (19:13)

"Hurry, flee there, for I cannot do a thing until you arrive there." (19:22)

Rashi z"l comments: Because the angel said to Lot, "We are about to destroy this place," implying that angels have independent powers, he was later forced to admit, "I cannot do a thing."

In a number of our prayers, we appear to ask angels to perform actions on our behalf. Among the most controversial of these is the plea, "Machnisei rachamim," which is part of the selichot prayers that precede the High Holidays. In that supplication, we ask the angels who are appointed to bring prayers before G-d to bring our prayers in as well. Even "Shalom Aleichim," which is widely recited on Friday night, is not without detractors, for by reciting the poem we are asking angels to bless us.

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century) is quoted as explaining that praying to angels is generally forbidden. However, when G-d has appointed an angel to fulfill a specific task, we are permitted to encourage the angel to perform that task. This may explain, says R' Auerbach, why the angels to whom we address Shalom Aleichem are referred to as "angels of peace" in the second, third and fourth stanzas of the poem, whereas in the first stanza they are referred to as "malachei ha'shareit" / "angels who serve G-d." In the first stanza, we are merely greeting them, so we refer to them by their most honorable title. However, in the remaining stanzas, we are asking them to bless us with peace; therefore we call them "angels of peace," as if to say: "You are angels of peace. It is your task to bless us with peace. Therefore, we ask

you to bless us with peace." (Quoted in Halichot Shlomo: Mo'adim II p.4)

"He planted an `eshel' in Beer Sheva . . ." (21:33)

A midrash states that "eshel" [literally, a type of tree] is an acronym for "achilah, shetiyah, linah" / "food, drink, a place to sleep." Thus, the verse is describing Avraham's hospitality to travelers.

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) asks: Why does the Torah not mention the hospitality of the Patriarchs Yitzchak and Yaakov? Were they less righteous than Avraham?

He answers: Avraham had a greater obligation to perform kindness to other people because Avraham had benefited from other people. Specifically, he had become wealthy at the expense of Pharaoh and Avimelech. In contrast, Yitzchak made his fortune in agriculture, and Yaakov, raising animals. Their debt to society was not as great; thus, they were less obligated than Avraham to perform chessed and they chose to serve Hashem in other ways. (Chochmat Ha'Torah)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

18 Marcheshvan 5759 [Sunday, November 16, 2008] is the mid-point of the 2711-day Daf Yomi cycle.

19 Marcheshvan 2: According to the Arizal, Hevel was killed on this day by his brother Kayin. (Luach Davar B'ito p.320)

19 Marcheshvan 5759 [Monday, November 17, 2008]: The Leonids meteor shower will be visible from much of the United States, as well as Israel. One who sees a meteor recites the berachah, "Oseh ma'aseh bereishit" / "Who makes the work of creation." (Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 227:1)

23 Marcheshvan [year unknown]: On this date, a "soreg" / a lattice- like partition was removed from the azarah / Temple courtyard. This soreg (not the same one mentioned in the Mishnah as a permanent part of the Bet Hamikdash) had been built by the Greeks for immoral purposes. When the Jews subsequently tore it down, they found many gems that had been left there. However, because it was not known whether the gems came from idols, and therefore it was halachically prohibited to enjoy them, the gems were placed in storage until the day Eliyahu Hanavi will come. When the Bet Hamikdash stood, this event was commemorated by a festival on which eulogies and fasting were prohibited. (Megillat Ta'anit)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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