

BY THE LIGHT OF THE SHABBAT CANDLES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Chayei Sarah

By the Light of the Shabbat Candles

Volume 27, No. 5

Sponsored by the Parness family in memory of Max Parness a"h

Mr. & Mrs. Howard Benn on the yahrzeit of his father David Benn a"h (David ben R' Mordechai)

We read in our parashah that Yitzchak brought his new wife, Rivka, into the tent of his mother Sarah. Rashi z"l writes, "He brought her into the tent and she became exactly like his mother Sarah." He explains that several miracles that used to occur while Sarah was living began to occur again, one of them being that the Shabbat candles burned from one Shabbat eve to the next. [Until here from Rashi]

Regarding Shabbat candles, the Gemara (Shabbat 25b) states: We read (Eichah 3:17), "My soul despaired of having peace" - this refers to [the absence of] Shabbat candles [Until here from the Gemara]. R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (Maharal of Prague; died 1609) explains: Light is associated with peace, because light allows man to differentiate between things. Peace exists when proper boundaries exist, which is possible only when there is light. In the dark, everything is jumbled, and there is no differentiation and therefore no peace. This is why morning is called "boker"--because the morning light permits "bikkur" / inspection, which leads to differentiation. On Shabbat there is peace because man refrains from work and rests. [Maharal does not explain this last thought. Perhaps he means that man thus differentiates between the workweek and the day of rest.] (Chiddushei Aggadot)

In light of Maharal's words, perhaps the significance of Sarah and Rivka's Shabbat candles burning all week is that these Matriarchs distinguished themselves by their ability to differentiate where their husbands did not--in Sarah's case, recognizing that Yishmael was a bad influence on Yitzchak; in Rivka's case, recognizing that Yaakov, not Esav, deserved to receive Yitzchak's blessing.

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

The Gemara (Shabbat 153a) states, "From a person's eulogy, it can be discerned what kind of person he was." R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva) explains: Hashem brings about good things through good people. Thus, if a eulogy awakens the audience to repent, then it clearly indicates that the deceased was a worthy person.

He continues: Our Sages say that our Matriarch Sarah died when she heard about Akeidat Yitzchak. This could be interpreted as spiritual weakness on her part and might lead one to think that she was not spiritually complete. But, if that were the case, her eulogy would not have made an impact on listeners. Thus, says our verse, when Avraham came to eulogize her, and he saw that the listeners were moved, he recognized her greatness and cried for her. (Keren L'David)

"Avraham was old, coming along in days . . ." (24:1)

Why does the verse say "coming along in days" rather than "coming along in years"?

R' Yaakov Yosef Hakohen z"l (1710-1784; known to chassidim as the "Toldos"; one of the foremost students of the founder of the chassidic movement, R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l) explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 153a) relates that the sage Rabbi Eliezer said, "Repent one day before you die."

His students asked him, "Does a person know when he will die?"

Rabbi Eliezer replied, "Certainly, then, one should repent every day so that every day he will be in a state of repentance."

The Gemara continues: King Shlomo likewise said in his wisdom (Kohelet 9:8), "At all times, let your garments be white, and let your head never lack oil." The sage Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai said, "This may be compared to a situation in which a king invited his servants to a feast, but did not tell them when it would be. The wise among them were dressed-up all the time, knowing that the king had the ability to make a feast at any time." [Until here from the Gemara]

This, concludes the Toldos, is the meaning of the phrase in our verse, "coming along in days." Like the wise servants in Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's parable, Avraham "decorated" himself every day, meaning that he lived in a constant state of teshuvah in case each day would be his last. (Ben Porat Yosef)

"Yitzchak came from having gone to Beer-lachai-ro'ee, for he dwelt in the south country. Yitzchak went out to supplicate in the field towards evening . . ." (24:62-63)

Why does the Torah tell us that Yitzchak came from the be'er / well? R' Yekutiel Yehuda Teitelbaum z"l (1808-1883; rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) explains:

Our Sages say that the second verse quoted above alludes to the fact that Yitzchak instituted the prayer of minchah. By telling us that he came from the well, the Torah is alluding to the chassidic custom of immersing in a mikvah before prayer. (Quoted in Heichal Ha'Besht, Vol. 14, p.61)

"Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother; he married Rivka, she became his wife . . ." (24:67)

The Gemara (Berachot 6b) teaches: "One who has 'hana'ah' / enjoyment from a bridegroom's feast and does not cause the bridegroom 'simcha' / happiness transgresses five statements [of the prophet Yirmiyah (see Yirmiyah 33:11)]."

R' Shalom Natan Ra'anan z"l (1900-1972; teacher at Yeshivat Merkaz Ha'rav in Yerushalayim) explains: The Gemara (Berachot 8a) states, "One who has 'hana'ah' from his physical toil is greater than one who fears G-d." [This is usually interpreted as a praise of physical labor, but R' Ra'anan gives it the opposite interpretation. He writes:] The difference between hana'ah and simcha is that the former is fleeting, while the latter is long-lasting. Thus, for example, the term hana'ah is used in connection with food, since the pleasure of eating lasts only as long as the meals or a short time thereafter. In this light, our Sages are teaching: One whose physical labor brings him only hana'ah--but not simcha, for he understands that simcha is found in spiritual pursuits--is greater than one who fears G-d.

Similarly, if one attends a wedding and his focus is on the hana'ah, rather than on the simcha, he has transgressed. (Quoted in Meorot Ha'Reiyah: Yerach Ha'eitanim p.316)

Elsewhere in the Torah . . .

"Happy are those whose way is perfect, who walk with the Torah of Hashem." (Tehilim 119:1)

R' Shmuel d'Ouzida z"l (Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael; late 1500s) writes: A person is expected to perform mitzvot and to learn Torah. "Praiseworthy are those whose way is perfect," refers to performing good deeds, while "who walk with the Torah of Hashem," refers to studying Torah. There is a difference between these two activities, however. In order to achieve happiness through performing mitzvot, one must do them completely and perfectly. Not so Torah study, which brings happiness even along the way. This is alluded to by the phrase "the Torah of Hashem," for after a person has finished studying a unit of Torah, it is called "his Torah." (Peirush Mi'ktav Yad)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l (1814-1891), rabbi of Kolomea, Galicia (today, Ukraine). The letter is dated 2 Adar II 5643 [1883], and is addressed to R' Yehoshua Falk, rabbi of Foltshen, Moldavia (today, Fălticeni, Romania).

Regarding your question about one who made a match for his daughter with a young Torah scholar and then had regrets, and he claims that his daughter does not want that boy; however, she informed the groom that she is being encouraged to say that, whereas she actually remains loyal to him--The halachah regarding this matter is clear . . . A cherem / ban should be placed on the father such that no one will help him marry his daughter to anyone until a bet din has investigated why she has rejected the boy, especially here, where she has informed the groom that they are encouraging her to say this. . .

Regarding the essence of the matter, I am very pained that things have fallen so low in our times, that truth is absent and the Torah is abandoned in a corner. Is it a small thing that the Gemara (Ketubot 111b) promises that one who marries his daughter to a Torah scholar is considered to have attached himself to the Shechinah? . . .

In this light, I have explained the parallel between two statements of our Sages: first, "Every day, a Heavenly voice proclaims, 'So-and-so's daughter will marry so-and-so'," and second, "Every day, a Heavenly voice proclaims, 'Woe to mankind due to the humiliation of the Torah'." Fifteen years ago [apparently, the girl in question was that age], a Heavenly voice proclaimed that this girl would marry this boy. However, he then used his free will to become G-d-fearing and a Torah scholar, while the girl's father became wealthy and, because of his wealth, he considers it beneath his dignity to take a poor Torah scholar for a son-in-law. That is why the second Heavenly voice now proclaims ["Woe to mankind due to the humiliation of the Torah"]. . . Therefore, your honor should forgive me and please inquire of the welfare of [the father] in my name and request that he reverse his decision, which was not a good one, and that he appease the Torah and its students, for it is the source of life and of length of days. I know for certain that he will regret his decision when he understands the irreparable harm that could result, and that I intend for his own welfare. . . (Teshuvot Bet Hillel No.20)

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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