

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

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Mrs. Rochelle Dimont and family
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Most of this week's Parashah is devoted to describing, not once, but twice, how Eliezer traveled to Charan and found a wife for Yitzchak. First, the events are described as they happen, then they are described as Eliezer retells them. In retelling his story, Eliezer says (24:42), "I came today to the spring . . ." Rashi z"l comments: "Today I started on my journey and today I arrived here, from which we may infer that the earth contracted for him." Rashi continues: "The mundane conversation of the Patriarchs' servants is more pleasing to G-d than the Torah of their children, for the story of Eliezer is repeated in the Torah while many important halachot are derived only from hints in the Text."

Why is the Torah written that way? Furthermore, what is the connection between the two parts of Rashi's comment? R' Moshe Teitelbaum z"l (1914-2006; Satmar Rebbe) explains:

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; the Chatam Sofer) writes that the Torah's elaboration on the activities of the Patriarchs' servants and descendants--for example, here, or the five times the construction of the Mishkan is described, or the 12 times the sacrifices brought by the Princes in Parashat Nasso are detailed--is an expression of Hashem's humility. From it, we should learn to prioritize His teachings the same way He prioritizes our activities.

One might, however, have come to the opposite conclusion, says R' Teitelbaum, i.e., that the Torah gives short shrift to many Mitzvot because they are not important; therefore, we should give them short shrift as well. Therefore, Rashi connects this lesson with the lesson about Eliezer's miraculously short journey. Our Sages say that Eliezer was a Rosh Yeshiva. The reason his journey was shortened was to minimize his time away from the study hall-- proof of the importance of Torah study. (Beirach

Moshe)

"Avraham was old, coming along ba'yamim / in days" (24:1)

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (1255-1340; Spain) comments on the verse (Devarim 6:24), "Hashem commanded us to perform all these decrees, to fear Hashem, our Elokim, for our good, kol ha'yamim / all the days, to give us life, as this day," as follows: This teaches that Mitzvot are good for the body and the soul. ["This day" refers to the benefits received by the body in this world.] "For our good, kol ha'yamim," refers to the benefits received by the soul in Olam Ha'ba. That is why Tzaddikim are described as "coming along ba'yamim," getting closer and closer to Olam Ha'ba. (Rabbeinu Bachya)

"It was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a Beka, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight." (24:22)

Why did Eliezer wait until the camels had finished drinking before giving Rivka these gifts? R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (1944-2001; rabbi of Ofakim, Israel) answers: Eliezer waited to see whether, after performing an incredible act of kindness, Rivka would wait for payment, or at least a compliment. But she did not; she turned around to leave as if she had done nothing remarkable. Then Eliezer knew that she was truly remarkable, so he gave her the gifts. (Tiferet Shimshon)

"Yitzchak went out la'suach / to supplicate in the field towards evening . . ." (24:63)

The Gemara (Berachot 26b) teaches that Yitzchak went out to the field to pray the afternoon Minchah prayer.

Why is verb used here for praying, "La'suach," similar to the Hebrew word for "vegetation" (see, for example, Bereishit 21:15--"Sichim")? R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) explains: Prayer, which our Sages call, "service by the heart," causes man's soul to flower with new powers. This is particularly true of Minchah, which is recited at the end of the day, when a person is about to shed the day's burdens from himself; precisely, then, the soul can soar. As a result, the holy feelings which are naturally found within the soul can be elevated and bear fruit.

R' Kook continues: Yitzchak and the Minchah prayer are associated with Midat Ha'Din / the Divine Attribute of Strict Justice. In light of the above, we can understand as follows: Minchah is supposed to bring out the natural tendency toward holiness that is inborn in a person. A person who fails to realize the potential that is already within him is particularly deserving of being judged strictly. (Ain Ayah Vol. I p.109)

"Then Lavan and Betu'el answered and said, 'The matter stemmed from Hashem! We can say to you neither bad nor good'." (24:50)

Rashi z"l explains their words as follows: "We cannot refuse this proposition [that Rivka marry Yitzchak], neither arbitrarily, nor with logical arguments. It is evident that the matter comes from Hashem, since, according to your words, He brought her and you together."

The Gemara (Mo'ed Kattan 18b) derives from here that Hashem matches a wife with a husband. Asks R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005): Doesn't everything come from Hashem? He answers: The Gemara means that, in the case of Shidduchim / matches, Hashem's direct involvement is more obvious than in other areas of life, so much so that the match obviously is G-d's Will. (Shiurei Chumash)

"'Here, Rivka is before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master's son as Hashem has spoken.' It was, when Avraham's servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground to Hashem." (24:51-52)

Rashi writes: "From this we learn that we should thank G-d for good news."

R' Leib Mintzberg shlita (rabbi of the Khal Adat Yerushalayim community in Bet Shemesh, Israel and rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Ha'masmidim) writes: Earlier in the account of Eliezer's journey to find a wife for Yitzchak, we read (24:26-27), "So the man [Eliezer] bowed low and prostrated himself to Hashem. He said, 'Blessed is Hashem, Elokim of my master Avraham, Who has not withheld His kindness and truth from my master. As for me, Hashem has guided me on the way to the house of my master's brothers'." Why, then, does Rashi wait until our verse to teach that one should thank G-d for good news? Also, why in our verse does Eliezer prostrate himself to the ground, while in the earlier verse he does not?

R' Mintzberg explains: In the earlier verses, Eliezer was not expressing thanks. Indeed, he could not express thanks because he had only just met Rivka; he did not yet know if her family would agree that she should marry Yitzchak. Rather, his reaction there was an expression of wonder at Hashem's Hashgachah Peratit, that he brought Eliezer to exactly the time and place where Avraham's relative was drawing water from the well. His blessing there was a statement of praise of Hashem, not a statement of thanksgiving. Only now, when his mission was successful, could he give thanks. That, also, is why he bowed more deeply now than in the earlier verse. (Ben Melech)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"Let him grant me Me'arat / the Cave of Machpelah . . ." (23:9)

The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) records two explanations of the word "Machpelah," which comes from the root meaning "double." One Sage says: "A chamber within a chamber," and one Sage says: "A chamber with a chamber above it."

R' Pinchas Friedman shlita (Belzer Rosh Kollel in Yerushalayim) explains the significance of these two interpretations of "Machpelah":

R' Menachem Azaryah of Fano z"l (1548-1620; Italy) writes that every prayer that rises to Heaven passes first through Me'arat Ha'machpelah. Why? R' Friedman explains: There are few among us whose prayers meet the criteria of an ideal payer that can ascend to the Heavens. But, the Gemara (Bava Metzia 85a) teaches that the Patriarchs buried in the Cave also pray. Our prayers therefore pass through the Me'arat Ha'machpelah so they can be lifted up to Heaven with the Patriarchs' prayers.

What are those characteristics that our prayers typically lack? The Gemara (Berachot 8a) states that one should "enter two doorways" before praying. Chassidic rebbes explain that these "two doorways" refer to "love of Hashem" and "awe of Hashem," i.e., a proper prayer must express those two feelings, as the prayers of the Patriarchs did. This is what one Sage of the Talmud alludes to when he says that the double Cave is a "chamber within a chamber," i.e., a "doorway" and a "doorway" beyond. Also, we are taught that one's prayer should not focus on one's personal needs, but rather for the "pain," so-to-speak, that the Shechinah feels when we suffer. This is what the other Sage alludes to when he says that the double Cave is a "chamber with a chamber above it." The lower level refers to prayer that focuses on lowly man's needs, while the chamber above it refers to prayer that focuses on the pain of the Shechinah, which is, again, how the Patriarchs prayed. (Shevilei Pinchas 5773)