

AVRAHAM'S PRIORITIES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Chaye Sarah

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #304 The Mazik Of A Child: Is He Responsible?
Good Shabbos!*

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik on Avraham's Priorities:

When Avraham told his servant to swear that he would faithfully fulfill the mission to find a wife for Yitzchak, the Torah describes Eliezer as "the elder statesmen of his home and the one who ruled over all that he had" [Bereishis 24:2]. Avraham was one of the richest men in the world. Eliezer was entrusted with running the entire household. He was in charge of a million-dollar empire.

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) asks why it is specifically now that the Torah introduces Eliezer with this description. We already knew Eliezer from earlier narratives.

Rav Chaim gave the following parable: A person comes into town hungry and wants to eat. In the Jewish section, he sees a restaurant with a sign on the door that reads "Kosher".

Rav Chaim explained that there are different types of people. One person would see the sign, take it at face value, and assume that the restaurant is, in fact, 100 percent kosher. A second person, one who is a bit more careful about the laws of Kashrus, would go in and ask to speak to the proprietor or an employee. He would look at the owner and see if he appears to be a religious Jew and an honest person, and if so, he will trust him. A person who is still more meticulous will not trust the sign or simply look at the owner. This third person will ask others whether this restaurant is commonly understood to be fully Kosher. Finally, a person who is completely meticulous will not rely on appearances or even on reputation (hearsay). He will call the local Va'ad HaKashrus (Kosher

certifying organization), speak to the Mashgiach (supervisor), etc.

Rav Chaim then gave a second scenario. A person enters a strange town in order to start a business enterprise, and looks for a local business to run his enterprise as his local, on-site partner. In such a situation, will anyone simply go by what he reads on a sign at the business? Will he judge potential partners simply on the way they look or dress? Obviously, when it comes to trusting someone with a \$100,000 investment, any sensible person would do extensive research and leave no stone unturned, in order to find the most reliable person possible.

So the same person who trusts a sign on the wall for kosher laws, would do days of investigation before trusting the same person with his money. For the average person, "kashrus is just kashrus; but Business is Business - one cannot trust just anybody!"

Rav Chaim points out that Avraham operated differently. Regarding Avraham's entire financial empire, Eliezer ruled over all that he had. Avraham trusted him without making him take oaths. However, regarding finding a match for his son Yitzchak - no sir! Avraham was not willing to trust anyone. "Please place your hand under my thigh" (a form of swearing). This is the most important venture of all.

Eliezer could be in charge of the entire portfolio and run the entire empire, no questions asked. But when it came to a marriage for Avraham's son, all of Eliezer's credentials, and even his exemplary track record, did not suffice. Avraham insisted that he swear in G-d's name, holding on to a sacred object.

Avraham Avinu had his priorities right. The future of one's son and his son's sons cannot be trusted to anyone - at least not without an oath. This is of far greater priority than merely operating a million-dollar empire.

Why the Idolaters in Aram Naharaim were Better than those in Canaan

Eliezer was instructed "...do not take a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites in whose midst I am living; rather go to my land and to my relatives and take a wife for my son Yitzchak" [Bereishis 24:3-4]. The commentaries discuss Avraham's insistence that his future daughter-in-law come from his own family. The issue is raised that both the Canaanites and Avraham's family members were idol worshippers. What, after all, was the advantage to one match over another?

The Droschos haRa"n answers that even though his family were in fact idolaters, nevertheless they had good midos [character traits]. The Canaanites were not only religiously corrupt, they were also basically selfish and unkind people as well. They had inferior 'midos'. It is taught by the Chassidic masters (in a typical Chassidic-style play on words) that Avraham points out the trouble with the Canaanite women by saying "...in whose midst I am living". The problem with them was that the "Anochi" ["I"] was always in their midst - they were self-centered and only into themselves.

It is true that the members of Avraham's family also worshipped idols, but at least they were

naturally compassionate and sincere individuals (ba'alei midos).

I was always bothered by this answer of the Droshos haRa"n. Lavan and Besuel were hardly paradigms of what we would call fine midos. After all, they were dishonest and had a passion for money. What then is the meaning of the Ra"n? I saw that Rav Nissan Alpert, z"l, addresses this question. He says that Lavan and Besuel were in fact fine people. They had good genes. They had the same genes as Avraham Avinu - they were generous genes. The trouble was that they lived in a land where everyone else worshipped idolatry. They lacked Avraham's backbone - to be able to stand up and say "I will not worship idols". They knew that it was falsehood but they did not have the stamina to stand up and say, "I will be different".

So what did they do? They went along with their neighbors. They lived a double life. They went to the office. They participated in the Avodah Zarah wherever they went, because they did not have the gumption to stand up and say 'No'. They went along for social reasons and for business reasons. In effect, they lived a lie. But the effect of living a lie after so many years is that the lie becomes real. It is psychologically terrible for a person to be two-faced. When one keeps up the charade for so many years, eventually it has an effect. If one fakes for so many years that he is a terrible person, eventually he will become a terrible person, even with the good 'midos' and the good genes.

This is what Avraham told Eliezer: The people there have basically good genes. Their 'midos' are basically good. Rivka is still a young girl. She has not yet lived a life that is a lie. She can still be salvaged. She has not yet become what Lavan and Besuel have already become - money hungry and money grubbing. She is still pristine. Therefore, take her. Yes, she was brought up in a house of idol worshippers, but her character is good. That is ultimately what always counts in a spouse, as we all know. It is the 'midos', the selflessness, the generosity, and the willingness to help that makes a good marriage. And it was Rivkah's 'midos' and generosity that ultimately convinced Eliezer that Rivkah was worthy of being the spouse who, together with Yitzchak, would found Klal Yisroel [the Jewish nation].

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Chaye Sarah are provided below:

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