

FROM WHERE DID AVRAHAM COME?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chayei Sarah

From Where Did Avraham Come?

A famous Medrash Rabbah on this week's parsha (58:5) cites the pasuk [verse] "And Avraham came to mourn for Sarah and to cry for her" [Bereishis 23:3]. The Medrash asks "From where did he come?" Rav Levi answers that he came from the burial of Terach his father. Rav Yossi questions this explanation by virtue of the fact that Terach died two years before Sarah and offers the alternate explanation that Avraham came from (the Akeidah on) Mt. Moriah.

Rabbeinu Bechaya deals with this same issue, and sheds new light for us on the dispute quoted by the Medrash. Had scripture wished to tell us that Avraham came from a certain place, it would have named the place. The fact that the pasuk states simply "Avraham came" without specifying a place of origin indicates that it was not important to indicate any geographic point of departure. Rather, the intent is to indicate that Avraham reached a certain level of inspiration in eulogizing his wife. When a person is inspired to do something, the Torah uses the expression "he is coming to it". "And Avraham came to mourn for Sarah" indicates that he was motivated to eulogize her for some specific reason.

Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that in order to address this question, the Medrash quotes the difference of opinion between Rav Levi and Rav Yossi. Rav Levi and Rav Yossi are not answering the question: "Where did Avraham come from?" Rather, they are answering the question "What was the inspiration that brought him to eulogize his wife Sarah?" Rav Levi says the inspiration came from the funeral of Terach. Rav Yossi insisted that any such inspiration would have worn off after two years; rather it must have come from Mt. Moriah where he had recently experienced the Akeida.

What was the inspiration that Avraham received at the Akeida that moved him to eulogize his wife? As much as one knows one's wife, Avraham sensed greatness in Sarah at the Akeida that he had never before sensed. If one has a 37-year-old son and tells him "G-d told me to slaughter you" and the son is prepared to listen and willingly be slaughtered, that speaks volumes about the son, but it also speaks volumes about the mother that raised such a son. For a person who is told by his father that it is time for him to be killed on the altar - even though it flies in the face of everything he knows - to comply with his father's order is not a natural phenomenon, to put it mildly. Yitzchak was only

able to withstand this great test because of the attribute of Emunas Chachomim [belief in the words of the Sages] that his mother inculcated in him from his earliest youth.

Using similar logic, we can now understand the viewpoint of Rav Levi who interpreted "When Avraham came" to mean he came from the funeral of Terach. Of course Rav Levi realized that the eulogy of Terach was two years prior to Sarah's passing. But Rav Levi was saying that the greatness of Sarah was even more astounding to Avraham because of the eulogy of Terach. Avraham Avinu knew where he came from. He knew that his father was an idolater. Avraham reasoned that he himself had the fortune to see the light of truth in his life. But it by no means would obviously follow that his children would likewise come to the same conclusion. Given who his father was and who he came from, it was not a simple matter that his son turned out the way he did. Considering what his spiritual DNA was all about, the fact that he had a son like Yitzchak who was willing to be offered upon an Altar of G-d was not something he took for granted. This speaks even more volumes about Sarah's greatness as a mother and role model.

Basically, Rav Levi and Rav Yossi are conveying the same idea. Avraham was inspired to eulogize Sarah because of the great son who she raised. After having just experienced the Akeida and being reminded of Yitzchak's idolatrous ancestry, Avraham recognized the great role Sarah played in making Yitzchak who he was.

Where Was Yitzchak?

In the same passage, Rabbeinu Bechaya raises the following issue: Where was Yitzchak when this eulogy and burial took place? Rabbeinu Bechaya suggests that Yitzchak was not immediately aware of the death of his mother. Sarah's death (according to the Medrash) was due to the shock at hearing of Yitzchak's near death experience at the Akeida. Having thus been indirectly responsible for her passing, the news of this tragedy was hidden from him for the time being. Rabbeinu Bechaya further suggests that during the entire 3 year gap from the time of the Akeida (when he was 37) until the time that he married Rivka (at age 40), Yitzchak remained at Mt. Moriah.

Others quote an alternate suggestion as to Yitzchak's whereabouts during this period, in the name of the Zohar. The Zohar records that Yitzchak was actually injured during the Akeida, and the Angels took him to Gan Eden during this period until he recovered from those wounds. Furthermore, it is based on this experience that Yitzchak later was able to identify the aroma of the coat of his son Eisav as being equivalent to the aroma of the Garden of Eden [Bereishis 27:27]: "See, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed".

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:

Tape # 030 - The Shadchan in Halacha

Tape # 072 - Superstition in Halacha

Tape # 121 - The Jewish Cemetery

Tape # 168 - The Laws and Customs of the Hespel

Tape # 214 - Pilegesh: An Alternative to Marriage?

Tape # 258 - Intrusion on Another's Shidduch

Tape # 304 - The "Mazik" of a Child: Is He Responsible?

Tape # 348 - Determining the Salary of the Shadchan

Tape # 392 - Purchasing a Burial Plot

Tape # 436 - Daughters: Shidduchim & Parental Wishes

Tape # 480 - Calling Off an Engagement

Tape # 524 - The Badekin

Tape # 568 - Feeding Your Animals

Tape # 612 - Dating Etiquette

Tape # 656 - Getting Paid for Mitzvos

Tape # 700 - More Mincha Insight

Tape # 744 - Turning 20: A Scary Birthday

Tape # 788 - Be Careful What You Ask For

Tape # 832 - Burying a Man Next to A Woman - Is This a Problem?

Tape # 876 - Kavanah in the First Bracha of Sh'monei Esrei

Tape # 920 - Shidduchim - Check Out the Brothers

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.