

NOTHING WOULD HAVE INTERRUPTED YITZCHAK ON HIS WAY TO SERVICE OF G-D

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chayei Sarah

Nothing Would Have Interrupted Yitzchak On His Way To Service of G-d

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #744, Turning 20 -- A Scary Birthday. Good Shabbos!

At the end of the story of Eliezer going to find a mate for Yitzchak, the Torah describes the first meeting of Yitzchak and Rivka [Bereshis 24:62-67]. The narrative begins with the words "Now Yitzchak came from having gone to the Well of L'Chai-Roee..."

Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam wonders regarding the significance of the fact that Yitzchak had returned from this well. Who cares where he had just returned from when he met Rivka for the first time? Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam gives a very interesting answer. The Well of L'Chai-Roee was the place where Yitzchak regularly davened [prayed]. When Yitzchak needed privacy and seclusion, he retreated to this place. The Torah stresses that this event occurred on his way BACK from the place, not on his way TOWARDS the place of the Well of L'Chai-Roee. The purpose is to teach us the following lesson: Had Yitzchak been on his way to execute his Service to G-d, even the arrival of Eliezer and Rivka would not have distracted him. It is only because he had finished praying and was now returning from this place that he took note of the arrival of his father's trusted servant and the young woman brought for him from Aram Naharaim to be his future wife.

Rav Moshe Shapiro wonders why it was that in previous generations, Europe produced students who were expert in all aspects of Torah knowledge and in our times, it does not produce such great Torah luminaries. Rav Shapiro suggests that it is because their diligence and focus was so laser-like in their formative years that they grew up to be the people they became later in life. Unfortunately, in our day and age, there are so many distractions to our Avodas Hashem [Service to G-d] and to our learning that we just do not produce the same type of Gedolim.

Rav Shapiro tells the story that Rav Chatzkel Abramsky once went over to a student and asked him

where he was during seder [the fixed-time set aside for learning in the Yeshiva]. The young man explained that he went to a wedding and that the wedding was in a different city. The student explained that it took him 3 hours to travel back and forth to the wedding each way. Rav Abramsky was dumbfounded that this student spent so much time just to go to the wedding of a friend. Rav Abramsky told him that he himself went to only two weddings the entire time he was a young man - - one was his sister's wedding and one was his own wedding!

When people have that type of intense focus in learning (hasmadah), with an intensity that is so strong that nothing can derail them from Torah study, then they may grow up to be people of the caliber of Rav Chatzkel Abramsky.

This, according to Rav Avraham ben HaRambam, is what the pasuk is emphasizing here by describing the fact that Yitzchak met his bride AFTER have returned from Be'er L'Chai-Roee. On the way there, nothing would have derailed him.

We obviously are not on the level to aspire to such single-minded focus in our Divine Service. However, it is important for us and for our children to understand the significance of any time that we must take off from our learning and our Service to G-d. This is how Gedolim are produced.

Avraham Died A Happy Man -- For Good Reason

The pasuk states that Avraham expired and died at a ripe old age when he was elderly and satisfied with his life (zaken v'Saveah) and he was gathered into his people [Bereshis 25:8]. The Ramban says the expression "zaken v'Saveah" teaches us how G-d deals with the righteous -- he grants them everything they desire. However, the Ramban says, the expression also teaches us an important lesson regarding the righteous people themselves: They are satisfied with their lot in life and they do not desire luxuries. They do not follow the pattern of desire expressed about most people -- that they can never get enough -- "Those who love money will never be satisfied with money" [Koheles 5:9]. The Midrash states that typically when a person dies, he does not even achieve half of what he desired in life. Avraham Avinu was not like that. He died a satisfied man, because he was happy with whatever he had. He did not lust after excesses. If one is happy with what he has then he has everything. One who is not happy with what he has never has enough.

Rav Simcha Zissel points out that this is the only place in the Torah where the Torah eulogizes a person. When all of the other Biblical personalities die, the Torah merely records their death and sometimes their age. The Torah normally does not provide editorial comment upon the death of a person. No "tombstone material" is provided. Even the comment "There arose no more in Israel a prophet like Moshe" was not meant, Rav Simcha Zissel explains, as praise but was teaching us the halacha that no one in the future would be able to override the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu. The only exception to this lack of eulogy is what the Torah writes about Avraham Avinu.

Now, what is the greatest thing that can be said about Avraham Avinu? If I had to write Avraham Avinu's eulogy, I would have said "This is Avraham Avinu who withstood the Ten Trials." Perhaps I

would praise him for allowing himself to be thrown into the fire in Ur Kasdim rather than bow down to idols. Perhaps I would praise him for drawing thousands of people to belief in monotheism. The last thing I would think to say about Avraham in a eulogy was that he died when he was old and content (zaken v'Saveah). Why does the Torah select this?

The Torah is saying that the greatness of Avraham was that he died a happy man. The Torah is telling us that he died a satisfied man because he had no great desires. He was satisfied with a little.

In Lech Lecha, Hashem comes to Avraham and tells him that after 90 years, Sarah will have a baby. Avraham falls on his face in gratitude. What is his reaction to the news? He should say "finally! Thank G-d!" However, what does Avraham say? "Let only Yishmael live before you." Rashi explains this remark: "I am unworthy to receive such a great reward, I would be happy if only you allow Yishmael to live before You." Avraham's reaction to this wonderful news is that he does not deserve it. The birth of Yishmael is already ample reward for all that he had done.

Such is the attitude of a person who does not go through life with an "It's coming to me" (es kumpt mir) philosophy. The opposite of the Yiddish expression "es kumpt mir" is "es kumpt mir gornisht" which means I deserve nothing. I take nothing for granted. Every little gift is a bonanza! This was exactly the attitude of Avraham. That is why he died a very happy and satisfied man and that is why the Torah praised him with this behavior.

When the Chofetz Chaim finished writing the Mishna Berurah, he said, "Ribbono shel Olam you have been so good to me. How can I finally pay You back?" If you or I wrote the Mishna Berurah, our attitude would most likely be "G-d, I wrote the Mishna Berurah. I put the Orach Chaim on the map for You. Now it is my turn. When is it going to be payback time?"

The Chofetz Chaim's reaction was just the opposite. "Hashem, You have been so good to me by allowing me to complete the Mishna Berurah. How can I ever repay You?" This is so different from how we typically go through life, so different from the attitude that He owes us so much. This is why we have so many unhappy people. If we are owed so much and we do not get it then we go through life being unhappy. Not so was the attitude of our Patriarch Avraham, who died at an old age, satisfied with his lot (zaken v'saveah).

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 Chayei Sarah are provided below:

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