

THE PARADIGM OF AVRAHAM AVINU / MARRIAGES ARE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIPS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #962 – Hard Cheese: Hot Dog After Pizza - Is There a Problem? Good Shabbos!

The Paradigm of Avraham Avinu

I would like to share two stories that are both related to *Parshas Vayera*.

The first is an article written by a first lieutenant in the Israeli Army who participated in the "Second Lebanon War" (July-August 2006):

"I remember the two weeks of near face to face combat, the confused orders, and insufficient combat gear; the intense hunger, physical and emotional exhaustion, and toughest of all the self-imposed silence and disassociation without our surroundings."

(If you recall, this war was not very well planned. Soldiers were sent into battle without the right equipment. They did not even have proper food rations. By most accounts, it was a "failure" for the Israeli army.)

"Our attitude was 'now is not the right time to complain but when it is all over – when the air raid sirens stop and we are out of these fatigues – we can talk and the truth will be known.' When the news came that we were receiving a day off, our hearts soared. We suffered so much stress and hardship; where would we go? How should we take full advantage of this gift? Rumors began to circulate that we were going to some school in Migdal HaEmek. 'This must be a joke', I thought. 'Who ordered 10 buses to bring us to some Yeshiva with some Rabbi who is just going to try to brainwash us?'"

"Tired and emotionally drained, we got off the buses and stood face to face with an old world looking Jew complete with white beard, side-locks, and a long jacket."

(This Rabbi happens to be Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman, also known as the 'Disco Rabbi'; Chief Rabbi of Migdal HaEmek, founder and dean of Migdal Ohr educational institutions and a member of

the Chief Rabbinate Council of Israel.)

"Here it comes, I thought, the push to put on *Tefillin* or to say some prayers. Some day off!"

"Boys", the Rabbi thundered, "I suggest the first thing you do is take a dip in the pool to freshen up. In the meantime we will make you something to eat."

(How did this story occur? The rumor got around in Northern Israel that the army needed a place for 600 soldiers to have a little R&R (Rest and Relaxation). Rabbi Grossman heard about this, he said "What's the problem – 600 soldiers? They should all come here, of course we have room!" This is how this battalion came to Yeshivas Migdal HaEmek.)

"With the echoes of war from the battlefield still in our ears, it seemed like a mirage or a hallucination. Soft music came from everywhere and flowing water and greenery surrounded us. Within minutes the tables were set with cold refreshing watermelon, cakes, beverages, cheeses, fresh vegetables, and soft rolls. Then we heard, 'Out of the pool! Get dressed and eat something!' We saw piles of new undergarments, 600 new undershirts, and underwear appeared as if out of nowhere, laid out on tables for our choosing."

"Rabbi Grossman sat with us and laughed. Have a good time boys. Have a great time. This evening I will put on the most spectacular performance that you have ever seen."

(Here is the line the soldier wrote that I want to emphasize.)

"I am not a religious person by any means but I cannot help but envision the first Jew, Avraham, standing and personally serving his guests, perfectly naturally without the slightest hint of condescension. He respected each individual and cared for his needs. Like Avraham, Rabbi Grossman saw this as an obvious act of kindness, a mission of a *mitzvah* that had fallen into his hands."

"As the evening continued, we learned that this is the essence of who Rabbi Grossman is and what he is all about. He said, 'Tell me friends; I heard that you are lacking different pieces of equipment. Do me a favor. Here's paper and pencil. Just write down everything you are missing and leave the paper on the table.' That night we enjoyed the entertainment and afterwards slept in soft beds in air-conditioned rooms. Like a fairy tale, we woke the next morning and could not believe our eyes. Mounds of gear that we desperately needed had arrived at Migdal Ohr. A small note from Rabbi Grossman said, 'To my dear friends, with all my heart.' Rabbi Grossman personally and immediately raised over \$60,000 worth of equipment from friends – literally overnight. The essential equipment included ceramic bulletproof vests, helmets, canteens, knee pads, backwater packs, night vision goggles, toothbrushes, socks, and more."

As this soldier mentions, this story is in the great tradition of *Avraham Avinu*. *Avraham Avinu* suspected that the strangers before him who came to his door were idol worshippers. Rashi says on the words "wash your feet" [Bereishis 18:4] "wash off your feet from the dust of *Avodah Zarah*". Yet

he served them like kings. Through such activities, Avraham and Sarah were able to accumulate "the souls you made in Charan" [Bereishis 12:5], bringing thousands of people "under the wings of the Divine Presence". It is in that tradition that people like Rabbi Grossman can make indelible impressions on even the most hardened of Israeli soldiers, who as they write further in this article "had never seen a pair of *tsisis* in their entire lives".

We must try to emulate this paradigm, to accept people for what they are without being judgmental or condescending. They are Jews. We need to help them and ask questions later.

Marriages Are Dynamic Relationships

The other story I would like to share is the following:

There is a comment in a Rashi in this week's parsha which is actually a quote from the Talmud [Bava Metziah 87a]. The *pasuk* [verse] says, "They said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?' And he said, 'Behold! In the tent!'" [Bereishis 18:9]. Rashi notes: "The ministering angels knew where our mother, Sarah, was, but they nonetheless asked, to make it known that she was modest, in order to endear her to her husband..."

They asked a rhetorical question, to complement Sarah in her husband's eyes and to make her more precious to him.

Rav Wolbe, in an essay he wrote for *Chasanim* [grooms] asks a simple question: When someone speaks at a *Sheva Brochos* in front of newlyweds, he speaks of how wonderful the *Chosson* is and how wonderful the *Kallah* is in order to cement the relationship between *Chosson* and *Kallah*. However, at this point *Avraham Avinu* was almost 100 years old and Sarah was almost 90. It is not clear exactly at what age they got married to each other, but it was certainly many years earlier. We would think that by now either "the bride was endeared enough" to her husband or that by now nothing would help.

Rav Wolbe therefore asks, what is the point of the angels attempting to further endear Sarah to her husband by pointing out how modest she was? Furthermore, we are talking about *Avraham Avinu* – a *Tzadik* who is the pillar of the world. We do not normally associate him with romance. Therefore, what is this matter of "endearing her to her husband" that the angels were trying to accomplish?

Rav Wolbe answers that from here we see that the matter of "increasing endearment" is something which is necessary the entire lifespan of a couple! We see from this Gemara that a person can be married for 30 years, 50 years, 60 years or more but marriages are dynamic relationships and dynamic relationships need constant growth and constant renewal.

Rav Wolbe further buttresses this idea by citing the Gemara in Nida. The Gemara suggest that the

whole institution of the halachic requirement of enforced separation between husband and wife during a woman's *nida* period is so that the wife, when she comes back from the *mikva* should be "as dear to her husband as a bride who enters the marriage canopy" [Nida 31b]. One of the worst things for a marriage, Rav Wolbe points out, is boring routine (*shigra*). That can destroy a marriage. There must be a constant process of "to make her dearer to her husband" even for an *Avraham Avinu* and even for a *Sarah Imeinu*, no matter how many years they have been married. This is something needed in every marriage.

I want to relate a story I heard from Rav Nosson Friedman that brings out this idea. This story is originally from Rav Sholom Meir Wallach in *Eretz Yisrael*.

There was a Jew named Rav Dovid Hirschovitz. He was an American who went to study in the Mir Yeshiva in Europe (before World War II). After spending some time in the Mir, he came back to live his life in the United States. At some point later in his life, he went to visit *Eretz Yisrael*. Since he was an "old timer" from the Mir Yeshiva in Europe, he visited Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zt"l, the great Mirer Rosh Yeshiva. It could have been more than 40 years since they had seen each other.

Rav Hirschovitz had a reunion with the Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz greeted him warmly. He hugged him and kissed him. He was so happy to see him. They renewed old times. Rav Chaim said he wanted to invite him to his house for lunch. He checked with his wife and brought his guest home for lunch.

At the meal, Rav Chaim acted in what Rav Hirschovitz thought was a very strange manner. When Rav Chaim first walked into the house he asked his wife "What are you serving for lunch?" She said "I am serving chicken and rice". Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, the great *Rosh Yeshiva*, the great *maggid shiur*, the great *Baal Mussar* sat down to eat the chicken and rice. He gobbled up the chicken and rice, leaving only bones on the plate. He literally cleaned his plate. He asked his wife, "What kind of spices did you use in this rice? It is delicious!" She told him and he asked for another portion. She brought out another portion of the rice which he quickly finished off. Again he said "So, *geshmak!* Really delicious!"

Rav Hirschovitz could not believe what happened to the great Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. After Mrs. Shmuelevitz left the room and was out of earshot, the guest said to Rav Chaim "What happened to you? In the Mir in Europe you were so involved in learning. The only thing you thought about day and night was Torah learning to the extent that people had to remind you to eat!" When you ate, people had to remind you to *bentch* because you forgot that you ate.

[Someone once told me that on Chanukah, after Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz lit the candles, he said *HaNeiros Halalu*, but he did not sing *Maoz Tzur*, because singing *Maoz Tzur* was only a '*minhag*' [custom] and he was prepared to forego the *minhag* so that he could go back to learn right away. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was that type of *masmid* [diligent student]. We look at Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz as a *Gaon Olam* (world-class genius) which he was, but he was also an exceptional

masmid.]

However, forty years later Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was asking about the recipe for the rice and cleaning his plate! Rav Hirschovitz could not understand it.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz told him, "You should know, I am the best *maggid shiur* [lecturer in Talmud] in *Eretz Yisrael*. This is not bragging. I worked on these *shiurim* for forty years. I said these shiurim in the Mir in Europe and in Shanghai. I worked over, refined, sifted, and resifted these shiurim so much. These *shiurim* are gold! Yet, after I say a *shiur*, when a 17-year-old *bochur* says to me, "Rebbe that was a good *shiur*" – that makes my day! What does a 17-year-old boy know? He does not begin to grasp all the questions resolved by my presentation and the clarity accomplished by my approach to the Talmudic passage. Yet, his complement makes me feel good, because that is human nature.

"This lunch," he told his guest "is my wife's *shiur*". This is what she lives for – to take care of me. Therefore, to make her feel good, I eat what she provides me with relish and with gusto. I clean my plate to eat up every morsel of what she provides. I did not become a glutton. This is her *shiur* and I want to show her that I appreciate it.

This is the idea of "to endear her to her husband". This story of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz took place when he was already an older man. He must have been married for more than 50 years. However, every wife and every person needs a complement regardless of how long they have been married.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Vayeira is provided below:

- # 029 - Mila and the "Yellow" Baby
- # 071 - Last Will & Testament of R. Yehuda Hachasid.
- # 120 - After Milchigs: How Long a Wait?
- # 167 - The Bris Milah Seudah
- # 213 - Is lying ever Permitted?
- # 257 - Makom Kavuah and Other Davening Issues
- # 303 - Milk and Eggs in Halacha
- # 347 - Women and the Laws of Tznius
- # 391 - The Mitzvah of Nichum Aveilim
- # 435 - Declining a Kibud

- # 479 - Mitzvah of Inviting Guests
- # 523 - Walking by a Person Who Is Davening
- # 567 - Asking and Giving Mechila
- # 611 - Shalom Aleichem on Friday Night
- # 655 - The Bris Milah Seudah - Fleishigs or Milchig?
- # 699 - Zichrona L'vracha, Sh'lita and Neru - For Whom?
- # 743 - Chazoras Hashatz - More Important Than You Think
- #787 - Tefilah—Guaranteeing Success
- # 831 - Hagomel for Elective Surgery
- # 875 - Visiting the Sick - Are 2 Better Than 1? and Other Issues
- # 919 - Bas Mitzvah Celebrations - Kosher or Not?
- # 962 - Hard Cheese: Hot Dog After Pizza -- Is There A Problem?
- #1006 - "I'm Mochel You" -- Do You Really Have To Mean It?"
- #1050 - Saying No to A Rosh Yeshiva / To Your Host?
- #1136 - Must You Start Shmoneh Esrai Exactly With Tzibbur?
- #1179 - I Have A Toothache/Headache/Cold – Do I Still Have To Daven?

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