

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

At the very first revelation Avraham was told to leave not only his country and his birthplace but also the home of his father. It was necessary for him to sever all his family and social ties. Yet here we find him sending Eliezer to bring a wife for Yitschak specifically from his family and ancestral home. Furthermore, they were idolaters just as were the Cananites in whose midst he dwelt, so why could not the wife just as well be from the surrounding nations? However, Avraham's family was the descendants of Shem and Ever, and their sparks of holiness had devolved on them. It was necessary for these sparks to be gathered and withdrawn from the impurity of the family into the formation of the chosen Abrahamic nation, so Rivkah had to be brought out of there. Later, Ya'akov was to go and bring about the same ingathering of the residual sparks of Divinity through bringing out Rachel and Leah. Even though there was indeed idol worship in Charan, the family there differed from their Cananite peers in that they possessed the Abrahamic merits of Chesed, as we see not only from Rivkah but also even from Lavan who provided hospitality for Eliezer and later brought the penniless Yaakov into his home. Idolatry is an intellectual error and can be corrected through education so the idolatry of Charan could be eliminated relatively easily in Rivkah. Chesed, however, is a merit inherited from generations of parents till it becomes part of one's nature. This inherited trait was present in Rivkah, but it could never have been taught to a daughter of Canaan, so she was the wife destined for Yitschak.

Perhaps we can see an additional perspective on the need for this chesed, in the light of the Shem Mi Shmuel's comment on the destruction of Sodom at the time of Avraham. Logically, this destruction should have occurred at the time of Yitzchak whose merit is that of Din. However, it was necessary to teach that even Chesed sometimes needs to be limited by Din, and therefore Sodom was to be destroyed rather in the days of Avraham whose merit is Chesed. In the same way, the Din and Judgement of Yitschak needed to be tempered and limited by the Chesed of Rivkah, even as Hashem had merged Din and Chesed when He created the World.

This merit of Rivka is related to the many questions that surround the shidduch of Yitzchak that covers more pesukim than the whole story of creation, Gan Eden, the sin of Adam and Chava etc.

Avraham was a prince of G-d (Bereishit, 23:6) and a king (Ramban), so surely everybody would be keen to enter into marriage with him. Even the distance should not be seen as causing a difficulty, since kings and nobles often make marriages across great distances. So it is quite unclear as to why there should have been such a prolonged story, replete with much prayer and requests surrounding

the mission of Eliezer? Throughout the story, Eliezer prays for Hashem's mercy towards Avraham rather than a reward for his great deeds, even though our prayers are all based on the merits and deeds of the Avot.. Furthermore, why was Eliezer sent when Yitzchak was 37 years old and should have gone himself for his mitzvah even as Yaakov did?

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah, 60) tells us that all require chesed even Avraham by whose merit chesed dwells in the world, so that if he himself would have prayed, it would have been understood. After all even though the tzaddikim are able to claim reward by virtue of their deeds, nevertheless, they see everything they receive as a matnat chinam that flows from chasdai Hashem. Still, one should depend on ones deeds and not presume to rely on chesed so Yitschak should have gone him self as did Yaakov. The Admor of Kotsk taught that the greater the precious stone the greater is the rock and sand that surrounds it, so the labour and work involved in extracting it is also greater. Yaakov had to labour for 14 years to bring out the great souls residing in the house of Lavan. Yitschak the pure soul redeemed by the Akedah, however, was not allowed to go out of Eretz Yisrael, even as Avraham instructed Eliezer. It would be left for Yaakov the grandson to go. Then the souls of Rachel and Leah would be redeemed solely through his labour on the basis of din, as we see in the use of Elokim in the prayer of Yaakov (Bereishit 28:21).

In our case the great labour was not possible and Eliezer had to rely only on Chesed to withdraw the rose from amongst the thorns. This was because Lavan and Betuel were both 'Arami', the falsehood that hides in the place of sanctity and makes the extraction of holiness much more difficult so that labor of its own was not sufficient and chesed was required.

We see this from the Avodah of the Cohen Hagadol. While he only entered into the Kodesh Hakedoshim in garments of white- purity and atonement, yet in regard to negaim, white is the sign of impurity. This refers to that tumah that hides itself within something that is externally presented as pure. The Mishkan was built so that Hashem could reside not only within it but betocham, within each individual; however, their sin transformed the white of the garments into the white of the negaim. When the pure soul leaves the body, powers of impurity enter and this creates tumat meit where outwardly the body still seems the same. Eisav was like the chazir that sleeps with its foot, that contains the cloven hoof of kashrut outstretched and its mouth that doesn't chew the cud closed, so he hid his tumah asking his father how one tithes salt. This is the kernel of hypocrisy, flattery and falsehood. 'Rivkah, the daughter of Betuel and the sister of Lavan Ha'Arami'(Bereishit, 25: 20); Her father was an Arami, a liar her brother was an Arami and so were the people of Charan. Yet she loved Yaakov, who was an Ish Emet- Titen Emet LeYakov- and not Eisav. So now this rose was to be brought out from this thorn bush and brought as a wife to Yitschak.

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