



Parshat Chayei Sarah: Overcoming Self Interest

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Our Sages say, "The conversations of the servants of our forefathers are more beloved to Hashem than the Torah of their sons." We see this clearly in this *parsha*. There are 67 verses describing Eliezer's quest to find a wife for Yitzchak. Why did the Torah devote so much space to telling this story?

The Shem MiShmuel explains by citing a *midrash*. "Canaan holds false scales with which to steal a beloved one." The *midrash* says that Canaan refers to Eliezer who held faulty scales in his mind as he weighed the proposition of his daughter marrying Yitzchak, the beloved of Hashem. Eliezer was Avraham's greatest student. He was clearly a *tzaddik* who raised his daughter with the teachings of Avraham. On paper it seemed like a perfect match. Yet Eliezer was of cursed seed while Yitzchak was

blessed and Hashem did not ordain the match. Eliezer still held out a tiny hope that Rivkah would not agree to come with him and then his daughter could take her place. Eliezer had vested interest for his mission to fail. Yet he was righteous, he knew this desire was wrong and that it colored his perception. Therefore, he prayed passionately to Hashem for success in his quest. He asked for objectivity and superhuman dedication so that he could go beyond what is normally possible and bring back Rivkah to Yitzchak. Indeed Hashem heard his prayer. While Yaakov worked 14 years to earn the hand of Rachel, Eliezer and Rivkah were on their way back to Yitzchak in mere hours.

Eliezer achieved a phenomenal level of absolute *chesed*. Most people do *chesed* as a form of self satisfaction. Both for the giver

and the receiver gain. Yet here, Eliezer's kind deed was done at the cost of destroying his own dreams. It was a *chesed shel emes* – kindness purely for the receiver's sake. He reached this height by dint of his righteousness and heartfelt prayer.

Eliezer's spiritual energy penetrated the greatest scoundrels of the world – Lavan and Besuel. In that moment of inspiration they agreed to do *chesed* too, by allowing Rivkah to leave their home to marry Yitzchak. This was a phenomenal feat, considering that Lavan HaArami was known as a world class trickster and Besuel represented evil at its deepest core. This is why Eliezer's story deserves such long mention. What greater lesson on the power of *chesed* can there be?

Parshat Chayei Sarah: Creating the I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Parshat Chayei Sarah describes the dramatic incident of Eliezer and Rivka at the well. The Torah tells how Eliezer devised a sign. If he would ask the girl for a drink and she would prepare water for his camels too, then he would know this was Yitzchak's destined mate. The book "*Bein Hamishpatayim*" asks, what was it about feeding animals that made her worthy to become the wife of Yitzchak? Does such a small action deserve such great reward? Additionally, why did Eliezer specifically judge Rivkah based on the *middah* of *chesed*? He answers that Eliezer was not looking for a single act of *chesed*, but for a girl whose whole orientation was *chesed*. If she would not only offer him a drink, but immediately switch into *chesed* mode and bring his camels water, he would know that this was a girl whose essence was *chesed*.

The Siftei Chaim explains that doing external acts of *chesed* without feeling is not true *chesed*. *Ahavat chesed* – loving *chesed*, is

not just making yourself feel good, but giving for the sake of giving. Pure *chesed* is the ability to shrink the "I" so that one recognizes and becomes sensitive to what others are lacking. Diminishing yourself leads to really listening to what your friend needs. Most conversations are a tug of war where each party is vying to talk about himself. When we interrupt, we move the focus of attention to ourselves. When we listen, we show we care.

Our Sages say that the Book of Ruth was given to us to teach us the reward for *chesed*. Ruth and Orpah, the two daughters-in-law of Naomi, acted differently. Orpah means "the back of the neck." Orpah calculated that there was nothing more she could gain from Naomi and she turned her back on her mother-in-law and left. Ruth, on the other hand, comes from the root word *ra'ata*, she saw. Ruth perceived greatness in Naomi. She stepped out of herself and did *chesed* with her and was subsequently rewarded by becoming the mother of Mashiach.

Eliezer specifically devised a test with animals, just as Moshe and King David were tested as shepherds. Egocentric *chesed* is limited. Animals cannot repay kindness. It is true altruistic *chesed*. Therefore doing kindness with them is actualizing the will of Hashem.

Many sources link *chesed* to *emunah*. The *midrash* says that one who does *chesed* is viewed as if he believes in all the miracles that Hashem performed. One who rejects *chesed* is deemed as if he rejected Hashem. The Torah begins and ends with acts of *chesed*. What is the connection between *chesed* and *emunah*? The wonders of creation proclaim that there is a Creator, only man's desires and passions blind him from seeing the truth. When a person can step out of himself to see the truth, then he will clearly see *emunah*.



Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Volume I, number 34

Brought to you by Naaleh.com

Bringing Torah to Life Teaching Children the Power of the Tongue Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Heller

Teach children that they may never hit others, not even to get back. Their parents and teachers are in charge of fixing things. If your child is the victim, you should emphasize that the fact that someone said something doesn't necessarily mean that it's true or important. Everyone shines at different things. Not being good at something, doesn't make you bad. Bad is hurting others or making them feel sad or afraid. Show him that the major problem is the bully himself and minimize the child's deficiencies. Make them see the difference between what is truly good and what is truly bad.

Storybooks are a great teaching medium. Many have the "ugly duckling" theme, where people didn't think they were smart or beautiful but were later recognized. The child should be brought to identify with the one who stood up for the victim, the one who said, "No she is a good duck."

At the next stage of childhood, from ages 7-11, *onaat devorim* gets more sophisticated. In addition to talking to them about feelings, you have to explain to them what it feels like to be victimized. Make it clear to them from an adult perspective that what they are doing is very cruel and juvenile. Ask the victimizer,

"Do you think people enjoy inclusion or exclusion?" As parents, do what you can to make sure your children don't become the victims. Try to see that they fit in with their friends. If that's not possible, you'll have to work hard to teach your children not to feel victimized

Teaching children about *shemirat halashon* is important. There are many games and books that can make it fun. Create a *lashon hara* group with contests and prizes. Make it socially cool to speak with refinement. Describe to them the various forms of *onaat devorim*. The issue should not be, is it true, but rather will it make someone happy or sad. Let them think, "How will this make my friend feel when I talk about it?" Having your child work with a special needs child can work wonders on their emotional perception and sensitivity. You can then slowly move them towards helping a shy friend socially adjust or standing up to a bully who is victimizing others. If you become aware that your child is the victim, you have to speak with the parents of the bully. Just as you don't want your child to be a victim, those parents don't want their child to be a bully. However, make sure not to create a verbal environment where the

parents feel belittled and afraid. This won't get a good response.

Teenagers and adults often speak hurtfully to defend themselves against attack. Fear may also generate *onaat devorim*. How does one change ones mindset? The only tool we have against the enemy of defensiveness is *emunah*. Instead of thinking, how can I cut this person down, think, what is my role in this situation? A short term solution would be to stop the argument by apologizing and taking concrete steps to improve things. A long term solution would involve speaking to the person at a moment when he is not angry. Say to him, "I cannot handle this kind of talk. Therefore, when things get out of hand between us, I will just not talk until things get more civil." Often, you may need to speak to someone else who can give the issue more time and see it in a way that's more true.

Ultimately, working on our own negative *middot* and constantly striving to improve our speech will rub off on our children and help them grow into refined, well adjusted adults.