



Parshat Chayei Sarah: The Divine Path

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

We know that the Torah usually uses succinct expressions. Many aspects of Jewish laws are only hinted at in the *Chumash*. Why then does the Torah devote so many verses to describing Eliezer's adventure in Charan? The Gemara says that *kefitzat haderech* (contracting of the ground) only happened three times in history. Why did Eliezer merit this miracle? In fact, why was his whole mission necessary? Why couldn't Avraham just find a wife for Yitzchak in the land of Israel?

Rav Rice notes that this wasn't just a simple match. The future of the Jewish nation was on the line. Yitzchak's wife would not only replace Sarah, but she would become the next of the *imahot*. There was a major difference between the Canaanites who had corrupt *middot* and the people of Charan who were idol worshippers. Evil *middot* leave an impression on the soul and are transmitted to future generations. Idol worship is more of an intellectual problem that isn't necessarily passed down. Avraham said, "*Lo tikach isha livni m'bnot h'Canaani asher anochi yoshev b'kirbo.*" (Don't take a wife from the daughters of Canaan among whom I live.) He meant to say, "*anochi yoshev,*" the ego, the sense of self is sitting amongst them which leaves no room for good *middot*. A woman from such a nation cannot be suitable to mother the Jewish people.

The sages say that Eliezer who was from Canaan really wanted Yitzchak to marry his daughter. Human nature would have had him to go on the mission halfheartedly and come back and claim he wasn't successful. But this

is not what happened with Eliezer. On the contrary he went above and beyond his duty. Before he set out on the journey, he prayed that Hashem should bless his efforts. And when he found Rivka he bowed down and thanked Hashem. He viewed the mission as his own and was able to overlook his personal desires to fully feel the joy of success. He was so totally devoted to his master that throughout the episode he is always referred to as the servant of Avraham. When Hashem saw Eliezer's self-sacrifice to do Avraham's will, he made the ground contract as if to give him that stamp of approval.

We are all emissaries of Hashem sent into the world to fulfill a unique mission. The Mesilat Yesharim says that true perfection is coming close to Hashem as David Hamelech said, "*V'ani kirvat Elokim li tov.*" (As for me, cleaving to Hashem is good.) Sometimes we get so caught up in life we forget why we're here. The word *mitzva* is related to the word *tzavta*, connection. Our good deeds form our personal spiritual bond with Hashem. Eliezer was the model of stepping out of the *anochi* (ego). He overrode his personal desires for a higher calling. The story of his search in Charan is emphasized with so much detail in the Torah as a paradigm for us on our mission in this world. Man is a composite of creation. When he works on refining himself, he elevates himself and the world around him.

In Bilvavi, Rav Schwartz suggests that the first step in working on one's character is to select one *middah* and to analyze it objectively. So often we want to just jump in and fix things. First one must take one's ego out of the

picture. Then one can ask, "How does this *middah* manifest itself in me and how I can work on it?" Judaism is a partnership with Hashem. It's bringing Him into our life and asking ourselves, "How can I best fulfill His will?"

The sefer *Einei Hashem* notes that Lavan hid his wickedness under a veil of deceptive respectability. With the natural trust of childhood, Rivka took it at face value and picked up on his outer refinement. But had she stayed any longer she might have eventually seen through the veneer and fallen too. Therefore, Hashem made Eliezer arrive in Charan with *kefitzat haderech* so that he could save Rivka in time.

Rav Nisson Alpert explains that deep down Avraham's family in Charan believed in Hashem. On the outside they went along with everyone, but deep down they believed. Yet this duplicity eventually impacted them negatively. Our surroundings have a tremendous influence on us. We are affected by what we see and hear but this is only true if we're somewhat connected to it. The way to safeguard ourselves is to immerse ourselves in Torah. If we're involved in a higher mission, if we have a path to follow, we won't get lost. The Rambam says a person is drawn after the society he lives in. Our homes, *yeshivot*, community, and Torah leaders, are our safety nets. Without them, going out into the world would be like crossing Niagara Falls on a tightrope. May Hashem help us to face the challenges of life with strength and faith.

Building A Connection

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Eliezar Miller

When a Jew merits to connect to his divine inner spark, he reveals inside himself powers of *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) above nature. This is because he is bound to Hashem, who is beyond the forces of nature. One who taps into his divine image will always feel a renewal in his *avodat Hashem* because the Almighty renews creation constantly as we say in *birchot krias shema*, "He renews in His goodness every day the work of creation."

The Sefat Emet says the more a person believes that everything is from Hashem, the more he'll feel that feeling of rejuvenation, as the verse in Yeshaya says, "Those who hope to Hashem will renew their strength." In the *zemirot* of Shabbat it says, "We opened our mouth and said as one, blessed is the One who gives the weary strength." This refers to the giving of the Torah when the Jews merited exceptional closeness to Hashem. At the same time they received incredible inner wells of

strength to serve the Creator.

The Nefesh Hachaim explains the concept of renewal in creation. Every hour there are 1,080 new spiritual forces that come from Hashem in the form of different configurations of the four letter name of *Yud - Heh - Vav - Heh*. What keeps up the world in this hour is not the same blend of forces that will keep up the world in the next hour. The Reishit Chachma cites from the Sefer Hapardes that a

Continued on Page 2

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Continued from Page 1

that a person breathes approximately once every three seconds, which equals 1,080 breaths per hour. The word *neshima* (breath) is similar to *neshama* (soul). The letters of Hashem's name pump renewed strength into our every breath.

Similarly every Shabbat is unique. On Friday night, we say in *K'gavna* that when Shabbat comes the *yetzer hara* departs and our inner spark emerges. With each Shabbat, a new aspect of the *Shechina* reveals itself and we are meant to bond with it. The perfection of all the Shabbatot from the beginning of creation through the generations prepares the world for *Mashiach*.

Likewise, the Arizal says every prayer is special. *Tefilah* comes from the root word *naftuli*, to connect. Each prayer is a new type of connection to Hashem that never was and

never will be. Shlomo Hamelech said in Kohelet, "There's nothing new under the sun." The material world is finite and limited. But above the sun, in the spiritual world, there's renewal at every moment.

When a person comes close to Hashem and connects to his inner spark he merits to know what his unique mission in life is. Just as the beauty of a painting is defined by its variegated colors, the beauty of cleaving to Hashem is that there are so many ways to come close to Him. The gemara teaches that in the future Hashem will make a circle for *tzadikim*. He will be in the center and every *tzadik* with his own unique way of serving Hashem will point and say, "*Hinei Elokeinu zeh*," This is my God. Likewise, each of the three forefathers served Hashem through their distinctive *middah*: Avraham through kindness, Yitzchak with justice, and Yaakov through

truth.

Bar Kapara says the whole Torah rests on the verse in Mishlei, "In all your ways know Him and He will straighten your ways." The first level is to know Hashem. The second level is to bring this knowledge into one's heart. The Ibn Ezra calls this *daat gemura*, when one can feel in one's heart what one knows. Rav Pincus notes that Hashem made a person's neck thin. This signifies the narrow difficult passageway between a person's mind and heart, and the work we need to invest to bring our knowledge down to the second level. Rav Yitzchak Blazer said that the distance between knowing and not knowing is small compared to the vast distance between knowing and bringing the knowledge down to one's heart. The more a person works on connecting to his divine inner spark, the more that gap will shrink.

Ask the Dayan 2

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Question:

One afternoon Mrs. Levy had the neighbor's children over to play in her backyard. At night, she decided to let her pet rabbits roam free around the yard. One of the neighbor's children had inadvertently left her shoes and the rabbits nibbled on them and destroyed them. Is Mrs. Levy responsible to pay for the damaged shoes?

Answer:

Anyone who owns an animal is liable for whatever they damage. However, it depends on if it is accepted normal behavior. For example, if you let your horse trample your neighbor's vegetables or eat from other people's property you have to pay for damages. This is because a person is responsible to guard his animal in a normal way. A dog wouldn't normally bite people nor would a horse charge someone, but if you know your horse is a charger or your dog is a biter you have to guard it.

You have an obligation to keep your rabbits from eating other people's food, but you don't need to make special effort to stop them from eating people's shoes. This is because rabbits don't normally eat people's shoes. Even for unusual damages that an animal causes though, the owner still has to pay for half the damages. This is in keeping with the Gemara that says if an ox hasn't gored three times and usually doesn't do so, the owner only has to pay half the damages.

In our times *beit din* can't enforce fines of the Torah but they would direct the owner to pay to appease the damaged person.

All this applies in a situation in which your animal goes into someone else's property. In your own domain, you may let your animals do what they want. But if you see someone has left something on your property, you have a responsibility to protect it. If Mrs. Levy knew that the shoes were left there, the shoes are considered lost property. According to the Shulchan Aruch,

a person who finds a lost object has the responsibility of a *shomer sachir*, a paid guardian, and is responsible for negligence, theft and loss. He is expected to take extra care of the find. Other commentators, among them the Rama, argue that a guardian of lost property is considered an unpaid guardian and is only responsible for negligence.

If Mrs. Levy saw the shoes and intended to return them before she let her rabbits out, it's as if she accepted responsibility to return them. Since the shoes were already on her property, it would not be necessary for Mrs. Levy to perform any act to be considered a *shomer*. Therefore, if she knew the shoes were there and did nothing to protect them from the rabbits, she would be responsible for negligence. Even if it wasn't expected for the rabbits to eat the shoes, she would still be responsible for damages. This is in keeping with the Shulchan Aruch that would consider her a paid guardian who is expected to take extra care.