

The Matriarch I- Sarah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

The *Torah* tell us that Haran bore a son Lot. No mention is made of daughters. Then the *Torah* says he had two daughter Milka and Yiska and *Chazal* quoting Rashi says Yiska was Sarah. *Midrash Lekach Tov* tells us on the verse "Sarah was barren and she had no child," that *ein* is not the same as *lo*. *Ein* means she still didn't have a child, but she would have in the future.

When they leave *Ur Kasdim* it says, Terach took Lot the son of Haran and Sarah his daughter-in-law and no mention is made of her father. There are *Meforshim* that interpret that Haran was really not Terach's son but rather a stepson. He called him his son because he raised him. But because Sarah was righteous, he didn't want to mention that she was the daughter of Haran because he wasn't a *tzadik*. It seems the *Torah* is trying to obscure her lineage. Rashi says she was called Yiska which comes from the root word *nisachim* -anointed. She radiated a marvelous beauty that people wanted to bask in. It's also an expression of *nesichot*-princess. When she got the status of a married woman her stature increased to *Sarai* -governess. She became a lady. The *Klei Yakar* says she was called Yiska as in- the *Shechina* was anointed on her. She was a great prophetess even before she became Avraham's wife. *Redak* says - Why does it say *bat Haran*- the daughter and not the daughters, if both Milka

and Sarah were his daughter. Perhaps Sarah is not who we think she is and was really Terach's daughter's daughter. Though it doesn't mention he had daughters, apparently he did.

Why did Avraham seem to put Sarah's honor on the line by telling her to say she was his sister? Was it right for him to go down to Egypt in the first place? After all Hashem told him- "Leave your country and go to where I tell you...I will make you into a great nation you will have everything you need." And yet when hunger comes he leaves Canaan and goes down Egypt. The Ramban says he made an error in putting his wife into a possible trap of immorality out of his fear that he might be killed. Furthermore, he should've trusted Hashem that he would save him and his wife and his possessions. Leaving the country and going to Egypt was a sin. The same Hashem that had told him to go to Israel could save him from hunger during the famine. And because of his sin, his children would need to suffer and go down to Egypt where they would be enslaved. "For where you see judgment coming down, know that there must have been an underlying sin there- if not in that generation than in previous generations."

The ruse that Sarah was his sister was necessary for survival. In ancient times, a woman belonged to her father or to her

brothers and they could sell her at whim. It was accepted in society that you wouldn't take something that belonged to someone else. So, if someone wanted a married woman the problem of the husband was resolved by killing him. Killing a person was less of a problem than taking away property. A father or brother could sell her. Abarbanel after quoting the Ramban disagrees. He says that Avraham went down to Egypt for two reasons. First, he believed Hashem's commandment to live in Israel didn't mean he couldn't leave for a short while. Secondly, Hashem's commandment are such that if you fulfill them you will live by them and not die by them. There was no *mitzva* to stay in *Eretz Yisrael* if it meant dying of starvation. We can justify Avraham's behavior that he didn't want to rely on miracles. But it doesn't say, *V'Hashem heitiv*-that Hashem favored his path. It seems ambiguous.

Rav Hirsh tells us in retrospect that perhaps he shouldn't have endangered his wife. But we know that Hashem watches over those who love Him and protects those who do His will. Avraham and his children needed to learn this by their own experience. They didn't have an example of someone before them. This is why Avraham was tested again and again and we are meant to learn from it. He himself didn't have whom to look back at. He needed to go through a great deal before he could recognize that Hashem would always stand by Him.



Traveling the Journey of Life Accompanied by the Book of Tehillim Part 19 Part 3

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Why does the Torah tell us the reward for *kibud av*? Honoring parents is a merit that can keep us in the land of Israel. But beyond that, there's another dimension. There's an eternal place that is our ultimate destination and we must go through life in this world in order to earn long life in the next world. This helps us understand why every child is obligated to honor their parents whether they are capable of giving him what he needs or not. Parents put us in this world and life is an opportunity to get to the World to Come. Therefore, we owe them respect for the fact that they brought us into this world and gave us the mean to earn *Olam Habah*. No parent is perfect. Even parents who seems to have no redeeming factor will have one positive aspect and we are obligated to look for that and respect them in our heart for it. The Alshich says the obligation stems from the fact that our parents gave us life, our most precious possession, because it is the key to our ultimate reward.

The Chasam Sofer says that *chazal* say it would have been better for a person to have not been created. Why then do we have an obligation to honor parents? He explains that this refers to people who make the wrong choices and fail to serve Hashem. They go through difficulties and live lives of futility

failing to reach their ultimate destiny. In contrast, those who serve Hashem live joyful, meaningful lives and their existence benefits not only them but their generation. If we understand this, then of course we will honor our parents for giving us life. This is also why we say, "*Baruch Elokeinu shebaranu l'kavodo.*" We thank Hashem for giving us the opportunity to honor His name by bringing spirituality into this world.

In the first few commandments, we accept Hashem as king, we recognize that He is the only independent being, and that He not only created the world but continues to guide it. Then we are given the commandment to honor our parents. If we understand what life is all about we will understand that we are a partner with Hashem in bringing the world to completion. Life is the greatest merit we can have as it is a means to eternal reward. Of course, we will then feel immense gratitude to our parents and seek to honor them.

The Malbim explains that the first time the commandment of *kibud av* is mentioned it tells us that the reward will be that your life will be lengthened. The second time it tells us, "*L'man yitav lach*- So that it should good for you." He explains there are people who think that the difficult aspects of life are greater than the good parts. Sometimes life seems like it's just

not worth it. The Torah doesn't demand of us to be angels. But it does gives us what it takes to be able to deal with challenges and overcome it. That is why it says, "*L'man yitov lach* -So that it should be good for you." We are affected by what we do. If we honor our parents even when life is difficult, we are in effect telling ourselves, life is worth living. This will bring us to feel good about life. If we respect our parents, we're recognizing that life is precious. This helps us focus on spirituality and on the real goal which brings us to a closer relationship with Hashem.

The *Midrash* tells us that that the first 4 commandments might leave us with a misguided feeling that it's all about Hashem wanting us to honor Him. But even that is for our benefit and the proof is the commandment of honoring our parents. Hashem wants us to appreciate life and having a relationship with Him is the greatest gift. It's not about Him but about us.

In *Tehillim* it says, 'Those who fear Hashem He honors.' Why is this verse parallel to honoring parents? If a parent asks us to violate a *Torah* commandment we must decline respectfully. If life is an opportunity to connect to Hashem, we cannot do something that will disconnect Him from us.

Rabbi Akiva's Students- Sefirat Haomer Vort

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

The 49 day period between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* marks the death of Rabbi Akiva's students. Chazal tell us that they died because they didn't show honor one to the other and it is a period of mourning to teach us that we need to work on this aspect of *kavod* in our lives. Clearly the students of Rabbi Akiva were on a level of greatness beyond our understanding. Yet we need to understand what we need to correct. The commentators note that when the *Midrash* speaks about the death of the students it never says 24,000 students perished. It always uses the expression 12,000 pairs. Why? This indeed was the underlying

problem. When they would learn in pairs together, they only chose a study partner who they felt was on par with their intellectual and spiritual level. It was a barely perceptible nuance and perhaps Rabbi Akiva himself wasn't aware of it. But deep within them was this feeling of- I can only work with somebody whose on par with me. And Hashem took their lives as a result.

The lesson for us is very clear. We know this is a time to work on our *middot* and perhaps one of the most important *middot* is to always strive to learn from others. Chazal say, "Who is wise, one who learns from every person."

Whether it is a young child or someone I don't know, everyone has a world of wisdom to teach us. Our lives should be growth oriented so that we can look at every person and ask ourselves, "What can I learn from the way they interact and what aspects of their personality can I integrate into mine?"

Let us utilize this time period between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* to ascend the mountain of Hashem, to grow as an individual, to become a more sensitive person in our interpersonal relationships, and a deeper, greater person in our relationship to Hashem.