Points to Ponder

Chayeii Sarah 5779

The days of Sarah were 100 years and 20 years and 7 years (23:1) – Rashi notes that for beauty she was like a seven year old even at 127. Why does the Torah want us to pay attention to how Sarah appeared physically? Why is that important? Rav Zeidel Epstein ztl. commented that a seven year old does not focus on her natural beauty. She often covers it in the dirt that comes from child’s play. At that age, pure beauty shines through. Here too, the Torah is stressing to us that even though Sarah was a beautiful woman, she related to that beauty with the interest of a seven year old and chose to focus on things more important to her.

And afterwards Avraham buried Sarah, his wife (23:19) – Rav Chaim Soloveitchik ztl. pointed out that when we note that Jews and non-Jews need to be buried in separate cemeteries, it follows that if someone were accidentally buried in a non-Jewish cemetery, that would make him a Meis Mitzva. Rav Schachter Shlita pointed out that there is a reason for this differentiation. Tosafos (Meseches Nazir) notes a difference between Adam and Ha’Adam. We are called Adam and the nations of the world are not. However, they ARE included in Ha’Adam. The reason, noted Rav Schachter in the name of Rav Soloveitchik, is that as a nation, we treat everyone with respect. The nations of the world focus only on Ha’Adam, those who are given significant station in life for whatever perceived reason. That is why when we see someone buried in an inappropriate manner, even the Kohein Gadol on Yom Kippur must go to deal with him – that is what it means to treat everyone as a significant Adam. It is a unique status of Am Yisrael that sets us apart in life, and in death.

Maybe the woman will not agree to follow after me (24:5) – Rashi explains that Eliezer had a daughter and he tried to make a Shidduch between her and Yitzchak and Avraham told him that his son was a Baruch and Eliezer’s daughter was from an Arur and a Baruch and an Arur do not match. Yet, Avraham sends Eliezer anyway to do the mission he certainly wanted to fail at. How could Avraham trust him? Rv Elya Svei ztl. explains that Eliezer was clearly so aware of his role in life that once his Shidduch idea was rejected, he could be trusted to carry out his duties fully. He understood that he was Eved Avrohom and so he begins his story with that caveat when in Besuel’s home. His ability came from an awareness of who he was, an acceptance of what each of the kids needed (both his daughter and his master’s son) and his firm desire to do right by all of them. That type of Anavah is refreshing.

And it will be that the girl that I ask her to let me drink (24:14) – Why was the water test enough to prove that Yitzchak was the proper wife for Yitzchak? Shouldn’t Eliezer need more proof? Rav Chaim Viskor ztl (Rosh Yeshivas Beis Hatalmud) explained that sometimes, by great people, simple actions are indicative of deeper convictions. This was the case with Rivka and the water test. It is reminiscent of a quip of Rav Chaim Shmuellevitz who noted that he would rather hear small stories about big people than big stories about small people.

Drink and I will also give your camels (24:19) – Why wasn’t Eliezer concerned that Rivka might have Chessed as a paradigm but not have the proper Hashkafa? Rav Michel Feinstein ztl. explained that when Eliezer saw her Chessed he knew that even if her Hashkafa needed tweaking, she would, utilizing her towering Middas HaCessed, learn from Yitzchak and endear herself to him.

I will not eat until I have spoken my words (24:33) – Why did Eliezer rush? Why couldn’t he eat first? Rav Gedaliah Eisman ztl. noted that Eliezer saw that this was a moment of opportunity. When moments of great opportunity come up in life, we need to grab them and maximize on them and not let them slide by us.

Yitzchak returned from the Beer L’Chai Roee () – Rashi explains that he had gone there to bring Keturah to his father. Why was Yitzchak involved in a Shidduch for his father while his father was busy with a Shidduch for him? Rav Moshe Wolfson Shlita explained that Avraham was a man of Chessed and Yitzchak’s primary strength was Gevurah. Beis Hillel’s strength is Chessed and Beis Shammai’s – Gevurah. Avraham held like Beis Hillel that Pru U’Revu is fulfilled when one has a boy and a girl. Avraham had Yitzchak and BaKol. He felt he was done and therefore neededto take care of Yitzchak’s Chiyuv first. Yitzchak held like Beis Shammai that Pru u’Revu is fulfilled with 2 sons. Therefore since Yishmael was born before Bris Milah (and was a Ger), Avraham had not fulfilled the Mitzva in his opinion and so he set out to take care of his father first.

And Yitzchak brought her to the tent of Sara, his mother" (24:67). Rashi explains that the same miracles concerning the candle, the Challah and the cloud that were present when his mother was alive, returned when Rivka joined him. The Midrash (60:15) describes the order differently – placing the cloud before the dough and finally about the candle. Why are these symbols important? Why does Rashi ignore the Midrash’s addition of a 4th idea – that the doors were always open wide? And why is the order of the miracles reversed? Rav Amital ztl. noted that each miracle was significant. The candle symbolized the idea that if there is real holiness in the home on Shabbat, then Shabbat influences the whole week. If no holiness can be felt during the week, this indicates that Shabbat is not being imbued with the proper celebration and sanctity. The dough symbolized the idea that having dough to spread around is not dependant on wealth but rather on good will. (therefore that and the doors are really one and of the same). The cloud symbolized the idea that each household needs to have a spiritual purpose, something beyond the basic maintenance of the household, some spiritual goal to which it can aspire. Rashi lists the miracles from the smallest to the greatest. First, one has to observe the basic mitzvot such as Shabbat. Then one also must address the mitzvot pertaining to interpersonal relationships and kindness. Finally, it is important that there should be some lofty spiritual goal – a cloud attached to the tent. The Midrash, on the other hand, simply lists the miracles in the order of their actual realization in the case of Rivka: since she had a superior spiritual purpose, the other phenomena followed naturally.

Haftara: And they would not warm him (I Kings 1:1) – Why would the clothes not warm him in his old age? The gemara (Berachos 62b) explains that when someone is callous with clothing it does not protect him. Dovid cut off the corner of the clothing of Shaul’s clothes and thus was punished wherein his clothes did not protect. Rav Aharon Kotler ztl. added that if it could happen in regards to clothing, it is certainly true in regards to Mitzvos. When we learn issues and see it as not relevant to our lives, this too, is Baz L’Chol Davar. Therefore, we need to double down and re-commit to find and make the connections to relevance in our Torah study.