

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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25 CHESHVAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH

Divine Protection

The servant took ten camels, of his master's camels, and went with all the bounty of his master... (24:10)

Rashi (ad loc) seems bothered by this *possuk* as it should be obvious that Eliezer would have only taken the camels that belonged to his master; why should the Torah identify them as belonging to Avraham? Rashi goes on to explain that Avraham's camels were unique and easily distinguished from other camels – "because his camels were always muzzled to prevent them from stealing by grazing in fields belonging to others."

Similarly, later in the narrative the Torah says that upon reaching their final destination "he (Eliezer) unfastened the camels," and Rashi reiterates that this is referring to the muzzles that the camels were wearing (24:34). Ramban (ad loc) disagrees and says that the "unfastening" mentioned in the *possuk* either refers to releasing the camels' saddles, or to untying the camels from each other, which was the custom when traveling with many animals.

Ramban contends that it is impossible that the camels of Avraham Avinu needed muzzles to prevent them from stealing. He goes on to prove this from the well-known Talmudic maxim that Hashem prevents the animals of the righteous from sinning: We find several stories (Talmud *Yerushalmi Dmai* 1:3 and Talmud *Bavli Chulin* 7a-7b) involving the donkey of Pinchas Ben Yair whereby the animal refused to consume food which wasn't *halachically* appropriate to eat. In one of those stories the donkey, which had been stolen from its master, actually refused to eat for three days straight because the feed offered hadn't been properly tithed.

Ramban therefore makes a fortiori argument; if Hashem prevented the donkey of Pinchas Ben Yair from sinning, how is it possible that He would permit the camels of Avraham to steal by grazing in other people's fields? Ramban thus concludes that the animals of Avraham didn't need muzzles.

In a similar vein, we find a Tosefta (*Shabbos* 12b) which explains that the reason one is forbidden to read by candlelight on Friday night is because you may come to adjust the light (which may

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lead to a forbidden act on Shabbos). R' Yishmael Ben Elisha said, "I will read by the candlelight and not adjust it." R' Nasan said that when R' Yishmael tried it he ended up adjusting the light: He therefore proclaimed "I, Yishmael son of Elisha, read by the light and adjusted it. When the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt I will bring a sacrifice for atonement." However, Tosfos (ad loc) questions: If Hashem protects the animals of the righteous from inadvertent sinning, how much more so must he protect the righteous themselves! In other words, why didn't Hashem prevent R' Yishmael from sinning?

We learn here a fascinating concept: one that provides us with a deep philosophical insight. Obviously, being a *tzaddik*



requires one to act in a righteous manner. However, Hashem doesn't act in order to keep people righteous by preventing them from doing something wrong – that would run counter to purpose of allowing people to raise themselves to righteousness.

Therefore, the only time Hashem prevents a *tzaddik* from inadvertently committing a forbidden act is when he takes every precaution to avoid such a situation. Meaning, Hashem helps the righteous avoid the pain of doing something wrong by protecting them when they have already done everything in their power to prevent sinning. The great R' Yishmael Ben Elisha felt that he would be able to resist the temptation of adjusting the candles – in such a situation Hashem wouldn't act to prevent him from violating Shabbos if R' Yishmael failed to control himself.

This would also answer Ramban's question on Rashi. Avraham had to muzzle his animals because he had to do everything in his power to make sure they wouldn't steal. But if, for example, a strap broke and the muzzle fell off, in such a situation Hashem would step in to prevent Avraham Avinu's animals from stealing. This is because Avraham would have done everything reasonably in his power to prevent such a situation from occurring. In this case, Hashem would then forestall the pain to Avraham caused by his animals grazing in another's field. Hashem doesn't keep people righteous; He prevents the righteous from getting hurt.

Lavan's Marriage Advice

They blessed Rifkah, "our sister may you come to be thousands of myriads..." (24:60)

Upon departing her family to travel to meet her husband to be, Rifkah is given a blessing by her mother, and brother Lavan. Remarkably, this blessing has become the standard Jewish custom for blessing ones' daughter on her wedding day. For thousands of years, Jewish fathers have used these exact words to bless their daughters on their wedding day during the *bedeken* (veiling ceremony).

One has to wonder – what is so remarkable about this blessing that it has become the standard blessing that Jewish fathers have used, word for word, to confer a blessing to their daughters on this most precious day? Not the least of the difficulties is the source of this blessing; Lavan is considered a very wicked and amoral individual who singlehandedly tried to wipe out the future of the Jewish people.

If we are going to use Lavan's words, one would at least expect him to have said

something deeply insightful or particularly moving. But his "blessing" seems pedestrian, at best, and yet *this* is the blessing that a father gives his daughter on one of the most meaningful days of their lives. What special message is being conveyed?

Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translates this blessing in an unusual manner: "Until now you were our sister, now you are going to be taken (in marriage) to that righteous man. May it be Hashem's will that thousands of myriads will come from you." Why does the Targum Yonasan add the piece about being taken in marriage to the righteous Yitzchak, where does he see an indication of that in the *posuk*?

The Targum is bothered by the word in the verse meaning "may you come to be." The blessing from Rifkah's family should have merely been "may you give birth to thousands of myriads." The incredible

insight given to Rifkah by her family is that marriage is a transformative experience. You may have left as our sister but you are now "becoming" united with a righteous man. You, Rifkah, are going to have a new identity, and this is a recreation of who you are.

This is the very message a father is supposed to give his daughter. Marriage isn't merely moving from where you grew up into another home. Marriage creates a new entity, and that entity will "become" thousands of myriads because a proper marriage transcends the two individuals and creates a greater "one."

This blessing is the very definition of what marriage is, and this is why almost every single one of the *Sheva Brachos* relates to either creation or Gan Eden. The message that we convey to the bride and groom on their wedding day is that they are being transformed into a new entity.

Did You Know...

At the end of this week's *parsha*, after Sarah passes away Avraham marries another woman, named Keturah. While there is some debate, Keturah is commonly accepted to be Hagar, the maidservant of Sarah, mother of Yishmael, and originally the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. The rabbis give two reasons why she is now called Keturah; one opinion says it means binding or sealing, since she remained faithful to Avraham. Another is that she was called this because of all the *mitzvos* and good acts she did – like Ketores (*Gen. Rabbah* loc. cit.). Here are some other interesting facts we found:

1. Rashi cites the Midrash that Yitzchak initiated the marriage. When Yitzchak was going to meet Rifkah, he said to himself: I have taken a wife, while my father is without a spouse! What did he do? He went and brought him Keturah (Tanhuma, Hayyei Sarah 8).
2. The children of Keturah are depicted as waste that issued from Abraham (Sifrei on *Devarim* 3:12).
3. Zimran and Yakshan were called waste because they would sing and beat on a drum for idol purposes (*Gen. Rabbah* 61:5).

4. When God wished to give the Torah, He offered it to the children of Keturah, but they refused to accept it, since they would not abandon the robbery and theft on which their lives were based (*Midrash Tannaim* on *Deut.* 33:2).

5. The rabbis ask: What gifts did Abraham give the sons of Keturah? He taught them the dark secrets of sorcery (Sanhedrin 91a).

6. Where did Avraham send them? The Living Torah (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan) says that all of Keturah's kids lived in the Arabian Peninsula, and Josephus appears to corroborate this.

7. Josephus adds there (*Antiquities* 1:15:1) that Afer, Avraham's and Keturah's grandson, fought Libya, won, and his grandchildren named it Africa after him. The etymology of Africa supports this, as the name Africa came into Western use through the Romans, who used the name Africa terra — "land of the Afri" (plural, or "Afer" singular) or Africa as we know it today.



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