YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT BY THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**PARASHAT CHAYE SARA**

**SICHA OF HARAV BARUCH GIGI**

Building One’s Home

Adapted by Immanuel Mayer

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“The conversation of the servants of the forefathers is finer than the Torah of [their] sons.” (Yalkut Shimoni Chayei Sara 109)

In our *parasha* we read about the mission entrusted to Avraham’s servant and his execution of it. The midrash informs us that his words are finer, more beautiful, than actual Torah teachings. This should motivate us to analyze his mission and his words very closely. Avraham’s servant makes a request of God:

“And he said: Lord God of my master, Avraham, I pray You, send me good speed today and show kindness to my master Avraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water. Let it be that the girl to whom I shall say, ‘Let down your pitcher, I pray you, that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will water your camels, too’ – let it be her that you have appointed for your servant, for Yitzchak, and thereby I shall know that You have shown kindness to my master.” (*Bereishit* 24:12-14)

We will not discuss here the issue of “divining” (*nichush*) as discussed by the *Rishonim*, and the question of whether or not this was an instance of a proper and legitimate sign according to Halakha. Our focus will be on the request itself.

Sara vs. Rivka

What is the servant seeking? What is his direction and orientation? As we know, the servant is dispatched by Avraham to find a wife for Yitzchak. Obviously, he is meant to look for the sort of woman of whom Avraham would approve. What qualities does he seek in the woman who is going to build up Avraham’s household, from whom the house of Israel will eventually emerge? What is his understanding of Avraham’s command? Whom is he supposed to bring back with him; what qualities should she have? The answers to these questions may be found in the midrash:

“‘And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of Sara, his mother’ – For so long as Sara lived, a cloud was attached to the entrance of her tent. When she died, the cloud disappeared, and when Rivka arrived the cloud returned…

And so long as Sara lived, a blessing permeated the dough. When Sara died, that blessing ceased, and when Rivka arrived, it returned.

So long as Sara lived, a flame burned from one Shabbat eve until the next. When she died, that flame disappeared, and when Rivka arrived, it returned.

When [Yitzchak] saw that [Rivka] did as his mother had done, separating challah in purity and separating dough in purity, then ‘Yitzchak brought her into the tent.’” (Bereishit Rabba, Chaye Sara 60)

The midrash enumerates three phenomena that had been connected to Sara, and had ceased with her death:

1. a blessing permeated the dough;
2. a flame burned from one Shabbat eve to the next;
3. a cloud was attached to the entrance of the tent.

All three are restored with the appearance of Rivka, and this is no coincidence. Avraham’s servant consciously and deliberately sought a woman with these qualities.

Let us now examine each of the three qualities appearing in the midrash. The same qualities can and should still guide us in our approach to marriage, and should be implemented in the establishment of our own homes.

**A blessing pervaded the dough**

“Dough” represents the material aspect of the home. It is important that the home be a pleasant, warm place, that there be “a blessing in the dough.” The material, physical aspect of the home must not be neglected or relegated to the bottom of the list of priorities.

Of course, our aim is that this pleasantness should benefit other people, too. A home that is wholly inward-oriented is not what we are looking for; rather, its goodness should make a contribution to others.

The idea of the home might be summed by the first clause of the priestly blessing: “May God bless you and may He watch over you” – this is the blessing that permeates the dough, the material aspect of the home whose goodness “rises” and expands, extending outside the home, too.

**A flame burning from one Shabbat eve to the next**

The flame represents ideals. We aim to build a home that rests upon Torah values, that is guided and nourished by the Torah and that endeavors to disseminate its light.

Avraham’s servant comes looking for a woman who will be a partner in the vision of building up Avraham’s household and the future house of Israel. He seeks someone who upholds the same aims as Avraham, who will command her children and her household after her to follow and maintain the way of God, in the most profound sense.

What many people seek today is a partner with whom they feel a strong and personal and emotional bond. Of course, this is very important, but it is not enough. We seek to establish a home on the foundations of Torah and faith. First and foremost, the most important criterion we seek is the bond of values that a husband and wife share. A person seeking a life partner should therefore focus on shared ideals, a shared view of reality that can lead to joint activity motivated by shared aspirations and values.

This lesson that we learn from Avraham’s servant might be summed up by the second clause of the priestly blessing: “May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you, and be gracious towards you.” Our values and ideals are the shining illumination that light the path of conduct and education in our homes.

**A cloud attached to the entrance**

The cloud, too, represents a very important element: it symbolizes the spiritual dimension, our aspiration towards that which lies beyond superficial reality.

Avraham’s servant seeks a woman who sees not only what is in front of her face, but also what lies beyond. In order to be able to look out from Lavan’s home in Aram Naharayim and to see from there the great edifice that Avraham’s household will become, one needs to hover ten *tefachim* above the ground; one has to know that there is much that lies beyond the here and now. One needs a strong, rich, full and unwavering spirit.

This is the third element that Avraham’s servant seeks in the intended wife for Yitzchak. And indeed he finds it in Rivka, in faraway Aram Naharayim. Even there she shows herself to be striving for spiritual growth; she identifies the unique opportunity and potential in the great project that she is invited to join.

This aspect of home-building might be summed up by the third part of the priestly blessing: “May the Lord lift His countenance to you and give you peace.” We strive for elevation of consciousness, for spirituality, a glimpse of God’s “countenance,” and we hope and long for peace and wholeness.

These are some of the important lessons we learn from the story in our parasha and from the wise behavior of Avraham’s servant. These values should accompany us and inform our choices when we plan to establish our own homes as part of the glorious household and dynasty of Avraham.

(This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Chayei Sara 5772 [2011].)