



In Memory
of our beloved

David Schwartz

who fell in battle
27th day of the month of Tevet, 5784
(8 January 2024)

David wrote thoughts on each of the weekly Torah readings taken from the core of the Torah that he studied in depth with his unique spirit. The Torah thoughts were originally published on the occasion of his marriage to Meital.

His Torah insights are shared now for the elevation of his pure soul and for the sanctification of his blessed memory

Chayei Sarah

From "Le'David Barchi Nafshi" ("Of David, Bless the Lord, O My Soul")

Words of Torah according to the weekly Torah reading by David Schwartz, z"l

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Chayei Sarah opens with the passing of Sarah and Abraham's eulogy for her. Following that, Abraham negotiates with Efron the Hittite to acquire the Cave of the Patriarchs (Me'arat Hamakhpela). In chapter 24, the Torah proceeds to deal at great length with the story of the shidduch for Isaac. No less than sixty six verses are devoted to this topic. This should cause us to wonder about its significance. First, we may conclude that this extensive description teaches us about the importance of finding the right shidduch, and specifically the importance of Rebekah in the establishment of the people of Israel.

Abraham our Patriarch blazed a trail by spreading the faith of monotheism. He was the first to fight for faith in one God, and therefore carried a unique responsibility on his shoulders. As the midrash (Gen. Rabbah 42:8) writes: "Abraham the 'Ivri' (עִבְרִי - Israelite) - he stood separate on one side (Ever - עֵבֶר) and the rest of the world stood on the other (Heb, ever) side." Through his personality, he brought about the transmission of the Torah and he changed history, such that his actions impact us in many ways today. Abraham knew that his son Isaac was to be the exclusive heir, who would be tasked with the burden of continuing his work of letting the Jewish faith take root in the people and the world. In light of all this, it is difficult to understand the meandering way by which Abraham chose to go about finding a shidduch for his son, Isaac. The whole story of sending his servant Eliezer raises many questions for us that we must answer.

As a side note, however, I first wish to mention the opinion of my grandfather Avi who believes that the source of Abraham's concern that Isaac should not leave Canaan may be found in the *Brit bein haBetarim* (Eng., the Covenant of the Pieces). In my grandfather Avi's opinion, Abraham is worried about the future exile. Since Abraham is not interested in being the "volunteer" who carries out the action, and from a desire to prevent or at least delay as much as possible its fulfillment, he prevents Isaac from leaving, doing so with an understanding that

as long as Isaac remains in the land of Canaan that decree cannot be fulfilled.

In any case, Abraham's concerns for Isaac bring him to what seems like puzzling and confusing decisions. On the one hand, Abraham does not allow Isaac to marry a woman from the daughters of the land. But he also does not allow him to look for a wife in a foreign land. We are left to grapple with trying to understand the motivation that drives him to look for a wife for Isaac from outside the land and wondering about how this option is in any way more kosher than the other option. How were the people of Canaan who were evil in the eyes of Abraham in any way different from the people of Abraham's birthplace? Abraham knew that was also a place of idolatry, as he was born there to Terach, a known idol worshiper.

Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz (the *Kli Yakar*, 1550-1619) asks this question in Genesis 24:3 on the verse that Abraham commanded his son not to marry from the daughters of Canaan lest he learn from their ways etc. How is it better if the marriage is with a daughter of Lavan and Betuel who also were idolaters just as the Canaanites? The answer might be that there is another point to consider, namely that the inherent nature of the parents may be carried on to the children. This is the case especially with sins related to eating and sexuality, and all the bad habits and traits like lust and envy. While idol worship is a sin of the intellect, it is not integral to a person and transmitted from parents to offspring. Therefore, Abraham distanced his family from his neighbors the Canaanites who were immersed in sin, but he did not distance Lavan and Betuel as they merely stood at the doorway to idol worship.

At a deeper level, the problem with the people of the land was not that they were idolatrous, but it was that their society lacked good virtues and morals. Rabbi Asher Weiss in his insights on the Torah (*Minchas Asher*) discusses this idea. He asks what fear motivated Abraham to command his servant Eliezer to go far away for a wife for Isaac, instead



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of looking among his neighbors, the daughters of Canaan. He explains that when Abraham came to Canaan and planted a vineyard for Israel and built his home, he was not afraid of idolatry at all. The light of Abraham had the power to outshine a weak spark of empty faith. Abraham, however, was afraid of bad habits and qualities, as those weeds could spread into the vineyard of Israel. As the gaon Rabbi Yisroel Salanter once stated - "It is easier for a man to move mountains and uproot hills from their place than to uproot one bad quality that is rooted in one's soul."

Essentially, Abraham's complicated actions stemmed from his desire to instill good qualities and morals, and the matter is so significant that sixty-six verses are dedicated to the topic. The subject matter remains very relevant. Sometimes we might find that we are being swayed by people's appearances or by their popularity, but in an extended and roundabout way Abraham demonstrates that we must seek good character traits and proper behavior, and ignore the superficialities. These matters teach us the great importance of acquiring proper character traits and following the proper path, which should precede attention to the minutiae of the Torah's commandments, and there is no need to state their overall importance. Our responsibility is to let the values of honesty and morality take root in our heart over other desires.

In Talmud Berachot 17a it states: "The Sages in Yavne were wont to say: I who learn Torah am God's creature and my counterpart who engages in other labor is God's creature. My work is in the city and his work is in the field. I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work. And just as he does not presume to perform my work, so I do not presume to perform his work. Lest you say: I engage in Torah study a lot, while he only engages in Torah study a little, so I am better than he, it has already been taught: One who brings a substantial sacrifice and one who brings a meager sacrifice have equal merit, as long as he directs his heart towards Heaven."

Only God knows what is in our hearts. We do not know by looking at outside appearances who is greater than his fellow. The obligation rests with us to look for virtues and good deeds, before everything else. That should guide our action.