

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

WATERWORK

“She descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended. The servant ran towards her....” (24:16,17)

Sometimes when we go to do a mitzvah, all kinds of things seem to make it more difficult. Why is that? In this week’s Torah portion Rashi explains that Eliezer ran to Rivka when he saw the water level rise as she came to water her camels.

The Ramban infers that the water rose by itself, because in verse 20, when Rivka waters Eliezer’s camels, the Torah mentions that Rivka ‘drew the waters’, whereas when watering her own camels, the verse doesn’t mention that she had to draw water, meaning that the extra effort of drawing the water was not required because the water came to her.

The question remains, however, why didn’t the waters rise to Rivka when she went to water Eliezer’s camels? Moreover, if Rivka merited supernatural help

when watering her own camels, surely she should merit no less when doing a mitzvah?

When a person does a mitzvah, G-d helps him or her to do the mitzvah in the best possible way. When Rivka went to water her camels, the water rose up to spare her the extra effort, but when she went to water Eliezer’s camels she did this with the intention to do the mitzvah of *gemilut chasadim* – performing an act of kindness. If G-d had brought up the water to meet her, this would have minimized her own involvement in the mitzvah.

G-d wanted Rivka’s physical action to be as complete as the intention of her heart.

• Source: Based on *Mayana Shel Torah*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty

camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

ISRAEL Forever

NO COMPLAINTS

Although the Patriarch Avraham was promised the entire land of Canaan, which would eventually become the Eretz Yisrael homeland of his descendants, he was unable to find a burial plot for his wife in the land he owned and was compelled to purchase one from the Hittite inhabitants.

The fact that Avraham voiced no complaints to G-d about the irony of such a situation is repeatedly cited in our sources as a tribute to his unquestioning faith in G-d.

As descendants of Avraham who have merited living in the Land given to him, we must internalize the lesson he taught us. Although this Land is truly ours we find ourselves repeatedly challenged by our neighbors and their champions as to our right to live here in peace. We too are enjoined to maintain our faith and make no complaints to Heaven.

It is such faith, together with our prayers for peace, which will inevitably secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

CAVE OF MACHPELAH

The burial place of the Matriarch Sarah is the subject of the first part of this week's Torah portion. The Torah describes the purchase of this plot by Avraham from Ephron the Hittite as including "the field and the cave within it" (*Bereishet* 23:17).

The cave in which Sarah was buried is known as the Cave of Machpelah (the "double cave"). One explanation of the name is the nature of its structure, one level



on top of another. A second reason for the name is the fact that four couples were eventually buried there – Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah, Yaakov and Leah.

The latter explanation is also the basis for the name Kiryat Arba ("the Town of Four"), which is associated with Chevron, the home of the Cave of Machpelah and its four buried couples.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand"?
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go"?
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

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THE PROBLEM OF THE CHEATER

“**T**he sin of cheating the public in weights and measures is punished more severely than that of sexual immorality.” This statement by Rabbi Levi is challenged on the grounds that sexual immorality is punishable by *karet* (extirpation) unless one repents, while financial dishonesty is not punished so severely.

The answer given is that even so serious a sin as sexual immorality can be atoned for by repentance, while there is no opportunity to repent for shortchanging the public, since

one cannot readily identify all the victims of his dishonesty.

This seems to run counter, however, to the *gemara* (*Bava Kama* 94b), which suggests atonement for such a dishonest seller who cannot identify all of his victims. He is advised to use his ill-gotten gains for a public service such as creating a reservoir so that perhaps his unidentified victims will benefit from them.

The explanation offered by the commentaries is that this is not real repentance, only the best thing that he is capable of doing.

• *Bava Batra 88b*

What the SAGES Say

“It is forbidden for one to have in his possession a dishonest weight, even if he is only using it for personal use.”

• *Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Rav - Bava Batra 89b*

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MISSIONWARY

From: Din

*Dear Rabbi,
All major religions have missionaries to invite people to join their faith apart from the Jews. Why?*

From: Emily

*Dear Rabbi,
I've been searching for the 'one, true religion' for some time, and when I came across Judaism, I knew that was the religion for me. I also read briefly about conversion - that Rabbis generally try to 'discourage' it. Is this true? And if so, why? I mean, I understand if it's to test whether they are sincere enough to continue, but most other religions welcome converts with open arms. And how do I go about converting? I understand it can be a long and arduous process, but I'm willing to do it.*

Dear Din and Emily,

It is true that other religions employ missionaries to spread their religion. Over the centuries, throughout the world, their techniques of "inviting" others to join have varied in zeal from intense persuasion to manipulation to exploitation to outright coercion.

The essential idea behind this proselytizing is that the more people that ascribe to the religion, the more powerful it is and therefore the truer it is. The veracity of the religion, and by converse, the falseness of other religions, depends on the number of believers or followers. Spiritually and psychologically, this offensive is basically predicated on uncertainty and insecurity.

Judaism is different. Its universal truth does not depend on how many people accept it, nor is its timeless veracity challenged by those who reject it. This stark truth is why Judaism has been such a bone in the throat of those who seek to contend with or replace it.

What all this boils down to is: Judaism is not about quantity; it's about quality.

This is what governs Judaism's approach to conversion. The underlying principle is that a person must sincerely believe in G-d and be committed to keeping all the commandments. For this reason, we don't proselytize. A person has to be sincerely interested on his own and approach conversion on his own volition. And more than that, we actually discourage the person from converting until we feel that the person is entirely sincere and committed to convert for the right reason — namely out of clear, correct belief in G-d and a resolute commitment to keep the Torah.

For this reason, even after a person's sincerity is accepted, a long period of learning and trial Jewish living must ensue under the supervision of authorized rabbis to enable the person the time to decide if this is really what he or she wants to do, and also to prepare one for the difficulties and challenges of Jewish life. This can be at least a year, and often a few or several years.

Ultimately, when the person feels and is deemed ready, the conversion involves: 1] An explicit expression of one's belief in G-d and commitment to keep the laws of the Torah. 2] For men, circumcision (if he is already circumcised, then a small drop of blood is taken for the mitzvah of brit, and then 3] The person immerses in a mikveh. He or she then becomes a full-fledged Jew who is privileged and obligated to keep the Torah, and held accountable for not doing so.

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KNOCK ON YOUR OWN DOOR

Question: While it is obvious that one must knock on the door or ring the bell in order to gain entrance to someone else's home, I have always assumed that this is unnecessary when entering one's own home. I have recently been told that it is proper to similarly announce your arrival even in your own home. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Our Talmudic Sages definitely advise us to

announce our arrival before actually entering our own home. The reason given is that someone in the home may be in the midst of a very private activity and is likely to suffer embarrassment as a result of a sudden intrusion.

Following such advice will be not only a worthwhile exercise in modesty but will also protect the valuable relationships between spouses and between parents and children.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

SHOWING RESPECT

At 9:10 pm on September 5th, not one minute before the time Shabbat ended in Moscow, the Israel Defense Force marching band set off from their hotel for Red Square in the Russian capital to parade before tens of thousands of people at the capital's annual Moscow Day celebration.

Two major American sports events, one between the

New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox, and the other between the New York Jets and the Tennessee Titans, were rescheduled to 1 pm on Erev Yom Kippur so that Jewish fans could arrive home before the start of the holy day.

The common denominator of these reports is the respect shown for religion even in secular circles.

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