



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

ישראל בן רחל נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Bringing Good News

וַיָּבֹא אַבְרָהָם לְסֹפֵד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבִכְתָּהּ (בראשית כג, ב)

Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her. (*Bereishis* 23:2)

There are many amazing things we can learn from the *Akeidah*. One of them is from this verse, which shows us how careful we need to be about what we say to people!

Comes a messenger to tell Sarah the good news that Yitzchak is still alive, but he begins by saying how her son was prepared to be slaughtered. Then he finishes the story by recounting that Yitzchak was saved and was not slaughtered in the end. But in the meantime, Sarah was so shocked that her soul flew away and she died.

The messenger arrived to tell her good news. If he had mentioned right at the beginning that Yitzchak is alive and well, and then, to heighten her joy over the fact that he is alive and well, proceeded to tell all the details – how he was brought to the *Akeidah* and placed on the Altar – then everything would have come out right. But he wasn't careful enough. He didn't pay sufficient attention to *how* he told the

story. He started with the "bad" part and delayed the "good" part until the end, and by the time he got there, Sarah was already gone.

Instead of being a bearer of good tidings, he was a messenger of the Satan.

This teaches us how important it is to be alert about what we say and how we say it. It is very common for a person to tell his friend something like, "Your son went on that school trip, right? I heard that the bus got into an accident – but everyone is okay." The moment that lapses between hearing about the accident and hearing that everyone is okay is enough to make a parent's heart miss a beat. We don't actually see the parent drop dead or have a heart attack or anything, but he or she has a heart pang. The one who told him the story has behaved in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of the Satan's messenger.

There are so many examples of this. We really

should think about the reactions that our words will evoke in others.

And this holds true even more so on the good side. If a momentary bad tiding can cause so much damage, surely a good tiding can bring so much benefit. It may look like a small, fleeting matter, but it is so great.

Let's say for instance that the husband sees he will arrive home a little late, so he calls to say that everything is fine, he is just behind schedule. There are many other cases where a little consideration goes a long way. This is especially true regarding

parents, as it is their nature to be concerned about their children.

Let us learn a lesson from the first of our *Imahos*, who died at the moment she heard bad news about her son, and always try to bring good news to parents.

Of course, this applies as well between husband and wife, and between people in general.

The Torah teaches us that bearing good news is one of the qualities of a good person, as *David Hamelech* said (II *Shmuel* 18:27): אִישׁ טוֹב זֶה וְאֵל – “This is a good man, and he will come with a good tiding.” ●

PARSHA TOPIC

Good Old Age

וְאַבְרָהָם זָקֵן בָּא בַּיָּמִים. (בראשית כד, א)

Avraham was elderly, he was advanced in days. (*Bereishis* 24:1)

Said R. Yehudah son of Simon: Avraham requested old age. He said to *Hashem*: Master of the Worlds, when a person and his son enter a place, no one knows who they should honor. If you crown a person with old age, people will know who to honor.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said to him: Indeed, you asked for a good thing, and it will start with you. From the beginning of *Bereishis* until here, it does not mention old age, and when Avraham appeared, *Hashem* gave him old age. Thus it says, “Avraham was elderly, advanced in days.” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65:9)

Looking Aged

Avraham Avinu was the first person to look old. Until his time, everyone looked the same, whatever age they were. Avraham argued to *Hashem* that he and his son Yitzchak look the same, and people thus confuse them for one another. So he asked to look aged. *Hashem* answered him that it is a wonderful

idea, and he will be the first person to look old.

This might make us think that Avraham wanted to look old just for a practical reason, so people will be able to tell him apart from his son Yitzchak.

But no. It says:

– יִפְּיֶיךָ מִבְּנֵי אָדָם הוֹצַק חֵן בְּשָׂפוֹתַיִךְ

You became most beautiful among people;

לעילוי נשמות

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

גדבת נכדיהם ~ עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם

grace was poured on your lips.¹

In the *Midrash*² it says that this *pasuk* refers to Avraham. In other words, it wasn't that Avraham wanted to look old just for a practical purpose; it was because he wanted to look beautiful, to look elderly. *Avraham Avinu* was crowned with beauty by looking old, with white hair and a white beard.

In our times, we don't understand what it's even talking about. Let's say a woman would say to her friend: You look so nice, you really look old! People don't think older is more beautiful. On the contrary, they spend millions just on looking young. Yet, Avraham wanted to look old.

It's hard to get it. Why? What's so beautiful about the appearance of an elderly person?

When I was a small child, and I heard people talking about the *Alter fun Kelm*, the Elder from Kelm, or the *Alter fun Slabodka*, it bothered me. Why are people trying to put them down? Why call them "old men"?

This is a mistake, of course. It's obvious that in former times, the word "elderly" was not considered insulting. Nevertheless, nowadays it is common in Hebrew to refer to the *Saba miKelem*, the "grandfather from Kelm," rather than to the *Zakein miKelem*, which would translate as the "Elder from Kelm." The new generation doesn't say "Elder" because it is not a compliment. But there were times when being called an elder was a compliment.

We will now talk about why being called "old" used to be considered a compliment, and today it is an insult. First I will give a simple explanation. Then I will offer a deeper and more correct explanation.

Long Past, Short Future

There are three points in a person's life: past, present and future.

When a person looks back on his past, and thinks about what he achieved, what he built in his lifetime, usually the answer is: not much. Regarding the

present, well, how much can a person accomplish in a single moment? Zilch. Only the future looks big and promising. Wow, what a beautiful future. People dream of becoming rich, wise, righteous... The past and present are not worth much. Only the future is rosy.

Accordingly, an old person who has a long past and a short future is kind of worthless. How much longer will he live? A year? Two years? He already has one foot in the grave. This is why being called "old" is insulting nowadays.

In previous generations, people looked at it just the opposite. The future is nothing, because a person can't know what will be tomorrow. You can't rely on the future. So the main thing is the past. That is where a person has a trunk packed full of greatness. He learned a lot of Torah; he did a lot of *mitzvos* with *mesirus nefesh*.

So in former times, it was more respectable to look old, with a white beard, because it meant that this Jew has a trunk full of greatness behind him. He is a great person. He has a big past and a small future. But someone who is still young, assumedly did not accomplish much yet. He hardly has anything. As for his future, who knows what will be tomorrow? So he is not worth a lot.

Live the Moments

וְאֵלֶּה יְמֵי שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי אַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר חָיָה מֵאָת שָׁנָה
וְשִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְחֲמִשׁ שָׁנִים – These are the days of
the years of Avraham that he lived: a hundred
years and seventy years and five years.³

This is what it says about Avraham. Whereas about Sarah it says שְׁרָה חַיֵּי שְׁנֵי – "The years of the life of Sarah."⁴ Why the difference? Why does it say "the days of the years... that he lived" about Avraham, but not about Sarah?

I once heard in the name of R. Yerucham of Mir that he asked: What does it mean "to live"? When a person eats pizza or felaful, is that called "living"? Not

1 *Tehillim* 85:3.

2 *Bereishis Rabbah* 65:9.

3 *Bereishis* 25:7.

4 *Ibid* 23:1.

at all. "To live" means moments of accomplishment, of greatness, of closeness to *Hashem*.

Usually, if a person lives to be eighty, he can hope to find in his lifetime a few moments like this. A moment here, a moment there. If a person can put together a few years of true life, this is greatness.

Avraham Avinu lived 175 years of true, pure life. There was not a moment that he didn't live in the true sense of the word. Not a moment that *Avraham Avinu* would not call "life."

So when he came to the age of 175, Avraham said to *Hashem*: *Ribono shel Olam*, I want a label that testifies that I am "advanced in days," that I have a wonderful past, that I am carrying on my back one hundred and seventy-five years of greatness. I deserve a medal, a white beard!

But when most people nowadays come to the age of eighty, what did they accomplish during all those years they had? They had dreams, but the dreams did not come true. So nowadays, old age doesn't mean a lot.

This is the simple explanation. Now we will go deeper.

Old Age is Nowness

According to what we have been saying, what has true worth? There is one thing that has real value, and that is the present. If a person can pray and say *Baruch Attah... Melech Ha'olam*, if he can say *Baruch Hu uvaruch Shemo*, this moment is a moment of greatness. It is worth it; it is valuable. Because this is what he really has. We don't have the past or the future. They are out of our hands. The only thing we have is the present.

How much worth is there to the present, to this moment? A person's present is worth as much as his past. We will explain.

Let's imagine *Avraham Avinu* waking up in the morning of his 175th birthday. And let's assume he knows that this afternoon he is going on to *Olam*

Haba, to *Gan Eden*. Avraham has in his treasure chest 175 years of the greatness of *Avraham Avinu*. He didn't waste a moment of his life. He is "advanced in days."

Where is he going? To *Olam Haba*, to eternity.

But no, right now he is going to *daven Shacharis*, and this *Shacharis* prayer is not like the *Shacharis* that a twenty-year-old prays. It is also not the *Shacharis* of a fifty-year-old, or even of a 120-year-old. This is a *Shacharis* that has in it the greatness of 175 years of greatness and spiritual elevation. *Avraham Avinu* put 175 years of greatness into one *Shacharis* prayer.

This is an elder. This is an old person. Being old means today I am old, and I want people to know that I am old, so they will understand and value what "today" signifies.

Imagine there is a job search for a person who can serve as *rosh yeshivah* of a large, well-known *yeshivah*. Someone offers his eighteen-year-old friend as a candidate for the position. Would anyone take it seriously? For sure not. This position needs someone at least the age of forty, because he has to be a person with a history of forty years.

But why is this so? What do we care if he is a young man under twenty?

Because when he gets up to deliver a *shiur*, it is meant to be a *shiur* on the quality-level of forty years of greatness. It's not an issue of the past; it's an issue of the present. This present moment needs to have the greatness of forty years.

An old person is not a great person because he has a past. This is a mistake. He is great because he has a present. When he *davens* today, when he learns today, he is putting eighty or a hundred years of greatness into everything he does. This causes his present to possess a very high quality. This is the reason that being old is a big thing.

It was worth it for *Avraham Avinu* to put in 175 years of greatness in order to pray one proper *Shemoneh Esreh*. ●