

פ' חיי שרה תשפ"ה

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WITHSTANDING TRIALS

“And Soroh died in Kiryas Arba” (23:2)

Rashi quotes the *Medrash* that Soroh’s soul departed after hearing that Yitzchok had been prepared for slaughter and she died before having been informed that in the end that he had in fact been saved from the *akeido* (see *Sifsei Chachomim*). Why was Soroh so distressed about the news of the *akeido*? She was on a higher level of prophecy than Avrohom, and her whole life had been dedicated to keeping *mitzvos*, so why would she not have been as willing to give up her son at Hashem’s request as Avrohom had been?

Our forefathers and foremothers knew that they were the pillars and prototypes for all future generations of the Jewish nation, and that their own experiences would be replicated time and again in the lives of their descendants. When Soroh heard about the *Akeidoh*, in which two righteous and holy individuals had to endure a terribly difficult trial, she realized that, in the future, even her most righteous descendants would also have to endure extremely challenging experiences, such as the many persecutions in fact suffered by the nation over the succeeding millennia, and that not even the tears and supplications of the angels could avert these events (see *Rashi* on 27:1). She thus began to cry ceaselessly, wondering whether her descendants would be able to withstand such enormous tests, until her soul departed due to her great distress.

MARTYRDOM

Alternatively, the *Maggid Meishorim* says that the Beis Yosef, Rav Yosef Karo, was promised by the *maggid* (angelic teacher) that he would merit dying a martyr’s death *al kiddush Hashem*. Towards the end of his life, when he was already well into his 80s, the Beis Yosef expressed his surprise to the *maggid* that even though he had put into practice all the preparations taught by him for the purpose of meriting this form of death, it had not yet happened. The *maggid* responded that he should not be upset since he had merited an even greater *mitzvah* than a martyr’s death: he had dedicated himself completely day in, day out to fulfilling the Will of the Creator. Dying a martyr’s death, as great a *mitzvah* as it is, only consists of a one-time act of self-dedication, but you, he told him, have performed endless acts of self-dedication throughout your life.

Similarly, Soroh was distressed that her son had had to die *al kidush Hashem* (as she understood from the messenger), so that he would be in a situation where he would no longer be able to sanctify Hashem’s name in this world, and would consequently no longer be able to achieve a higher level than he could by being offered up on the altar. Her soul departed from shock and distress upon hearing this, at the thought that the whole of *klal yisroel* had suffered a grievous loss in light of the fact that Yitzchok would no longer be able to be *mekadesh Hashem* in this world.

Rav Sternbuch was with Rav Dessler in the middle of World War II when Rav Dessler heard about the fate of his fellow Kelmers. (See Rav Dessler’s letter to his son in *Michtav M’Eliyahu*, which describes their martyrdom.)

Rav Dessler asked how this could have been considered an incident of *kiddush Hashem*, since they had not been given the choice of saving their lives by abandoning their religion or transgressing a commandment. He answered that since they had not attributed their death to natural causes, or complained that Hashem had abandoned them, but had rather accepted the Divine decree lovingly and gone to their deaths with the feeling that this was Hashem's will, and that they were performing it, they had sanctified the Divine Name, because *kiddush Hashem* means acting for the sake of Hashem's honor.

Based on this, we may suggest that by agreeing to be bound on the *mizbeach*, Yitzchok had demonstrated his dedication to die for this sanctification of the Divine Name with joy and complete faith, and Soroh could therefore not understand why Yitzchok actually needed to die since the act of *kiddush Hashem* had already been accomplished by the very fact that he had consented joyfully to die *al kiddush Hashem*.

NO GRABBING

"And Avrohom weighed out the silver for Efron" (23:16)

Efron in this *posuk* is spelled without a *vov*. The *Medrash* applies the following *possuk* in *Mishlei* (28:22) to Efron: *"He who has an evil eye which hastens after riches and does not know that want shall come upon him."* Efron did not realize that his attempt to overcharge Avrohom so much would result not only in the loss of the unlawful gain, but also in many other losses.

When Rav Sternbuch was a child, Rav Elchonon Wasserman once came to his family for a *Shabbos* meal. Rav Sternbuch's mother, who had been widowed with nine young children, asked Rav Wasserman the following: "I have to have trust in Hashem, but, on the other hand, I have to make a living to support my children, and doing that takes up a lot of my time. What am I supposed to do?"

Rav Elchonon responded that he could not tell her how much time to spend on her work, but one thing he could tell her was that there is no *chapping* (grabbing) in this world, and someone who imagines that by working harder he will earn more and be happier, is only deluding himself. Even if he does in fact make money, he may end up losing it, as well as his other possessions, his wife or children may suffer health problems, etc., so that it will turn out that his *chapping* got him nowhere. Whatever is meant to be his, will become his in any case, and the main thing is to always bear in mind that we are on the way to our eternal existence, and have to prepare ourselves for that, instead of trying to grab some illusory ephemeral benefits. Rav Elchonon concluded by telling Mrs. Sternbuch that she should do whatever she had to do to make a living, without forgetting that her main duties were always in spiritual matters, in leading a life of Torah, and in educating each child in the path of Torah day in and day out.

SHABBOS WITH RAV MORDECHAI POGRAMANSKY

And Avrohom said to his servant, the elder of his house who ruled over all that was his, "Please place your hand under my thigh." (24:2)

The *possuk* mentions in this context that Eliezer had free rein over Avrohom's property. This brings home the point that although Avrohom trusted Eliezer completely with regard to his material assets, when it came to spiritual matters, such as finding a spouse for Yitzchok,

he did not rely on him. Rather, he insisted that Eliezer take an oath not to take a wife for Yitzchok from the inhabitants of Canaan.

Rav Sternbuch recalls the time when he was visiting Rav Mordechai Pogramansky in Paris in the 1940s after the War. It was *erev Shabbos* and Rav Sternbuch told Rav Pogramansky that he had met a *chareidi*-looking Jew, who had told him that although he could not sell him meat for Shabbos, since there was nothing available of a sufficiently high kashrus standard, he could sell him some fish, grape juice and *challos*. Rav Sternbuch asked Rav Pogramansky whether he could rely on this person and buy food from him. Rav Pogramansky responded by asking Rav Sternbuch whether he would entrust this stranger with a large sum of money. Rav Sternbuch replied that he was not sure. Rav Pogramansky answered, “Well, when it comes to spiritual matters we have to be even more careful about trusting other people!”

In practice, if something is very important to a person, he deals with it himself. For example, he will not let anyone else run his business. When it comes to material matters, one often does not trust anyone else, but when it comes to significant spiritual issues such as insisting on the best *hechsher* or educating children, some people willingly compromise on their kashrus standards, or entrust their childrens’ education to others without taking sufficient interest in their child’s spiritual situation.

Rav Pogramansky concluded by telling Rav Sternbuch that he should not buy from that person, but rather join him for the Shabbos meals. During that Shabbos Rav Sternbuch had the privilege of witnessing Rav Pogramansky’s exacting standards. He would check the *kashrus* of every food and drink before partaking of it. He would not eat ordinary bread, fearing that it had been touched by someone who had not done *netilas yodayim*. He would not eat fish in case it had worms, and only eat fruit if he was sure that it was not from *Eretz Yisroel* because of *terumos*, *ma’asros* and *orlo*. He would not drink grape juice in case it had been touched by someone with heretical views, and therefore asked Rav Sternbuch to help him squeeze grapes on Friday to make grape juice for *Kiddush*. During *Shabbos* Rav Sternbuch noticed how particular his host was about *borer*, not just with regard to food but also with regard to utensils, clothes and books. Rav Pogramansky feared sin as much as the Angel of Death!

BAALEI TESHUVA

“Please place your hand under my thigh.” (24:2)

Since Eliezer was not born into a home of *kedusho*, the evil inclination had an especially strong hold on him and fought him about all sorts of matters. Therefore, Avrohom was afraid that the evil inclination would overcome him and convince him not to travel a great distance, but rather take a wife from Canaan for Yitzchok. That is why Avrohom insisted that Eliezer take an oath, so that he would be forced to overcome his *yetzer* and fulfil his master’s wishes.

Sometimes a *baal teshuva* is on a higher level than a Jew born into a religious home, since he has to overcome many trials. We therefore have to draw *ba'alei teshuva* close to us, since they are people of great courage.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN *SHIDDUCHIM*

She . . . will be the one whom you have determined for your servant, Yitzchok (24:14)

The Brisker Rov once noted that the efforts we put into finding a partner do not always seem to bear fruit, and the real *zivug* appears like a lost object at the appropriate time. On the other hand, he also noted that Eliezer did not rely on the miracles he experienced on the way, such as a *kefitzas haderech*, in order to determine whether this was indeed Yitzchok's *zivug*. Instead, he made a point of examining thoroughly whether Rivka's acts of *chesed* were on a sufficiently high level for his master's son. We too must surely examine the *midos* of any potential marriage partner as much as possible.

The Chazon Ish told Rav Sternbuch that the main quality to look for in a girl is that she should be easygoing and not stubborn, since such a character trait can cause a marriage to fail. Eliezer too only checked what Rivka's *middos* were like, rather than her *hashkofos* or *yiras shomayim*, for example, because her conduct proved that she had a yielding nature and would therefore be likely to follow her righteous husband's path and views.

Furthermore, choosing a wife is a decision which is decisive for a person's future in this world and the next, and, unfortunately, sometimes a girl wants to marry a *ben Torah* like all her friends, but, in practise, wants her husband to spend time with her after the wedding going out for entertainment and the like, so that his time is taken away from his *melechesh shomayim*, until he eventually loses his superior qualities as a *talmid chochom* or even a *ben Torah*. Therefore, in these matters, one cannot rely on rumours, and one must rather examine very carefully whether the girl intends to genuinely dedicate herself to Torah.

DATING

And she said, "Drink, my lord." And she hastened and lowered her pitcher to her hand, and she gave him to drink (24:18)

This *shidduch* took place with great speed. As the Brisker Rov points out, even though Eliezer only reached Aram Naharayim towards evening before sunset he prayed "please cause to happen to me today" (24:12), i.e. that Hashem should arrange matters so that he would find the *shidduch* already before sunset that very same day. *Tzaddikim* treat *shidduchim* with great alacrity. Hence, when Rivka *hastened* to lower her pitcher that was proof that she was a worthy wife for Yitzchok, because speed and a lack of obstacles are signs of a true *zivvug*.

Both long engagement periods and too many meetings during the engagement period¹ should be avoided. People think that these meetings are conducive for a better relationship after marriage, but, in reality, in addition to modesty-related problems that can arise during such meetings, they can also be harmful to the relationship between the couple. Every person

¹ Rav Sternbuch is also very opposed to having many dates in the period before the engagement.

has drawbacks and deficiencies, which only become noticeable once one gets to know them better. In the marital situation a couple can usually deal with this, and sort things out between themselves, but before marriage this can lead to unnecessary tensions. Therefore, it is better to keep the engagement period as short as possible and to only meet at irregular intervals.

MELAMDIM

"And he said, 'I am Avrohom's servant'" (24:34)

Eliezer was not merely Avrohom's servant, he "ruled over all his belongings" (see above: 24:2). Why did Eliezer choose to call himself by a more modest title?

In reality, "Avrohom's servant" is the most honorable title he could have chosen for himself, because serving Avrohom and assisting him was a much greater merit than ruling over all his belongings, and that is why Eliezer introduced himself using such a title.

To be *meshamesh* a *tzaddik* or *talmid chochom* seems a less honorable task than helping him in other ways, but, in truth, it is the greatest privilege, and someone fortunate enough to hold such a position should be proud of it, not embarrassed.

On a similar note, Rav Moshe Schneider told Rav Sternbuch that when people started to treat *cheder rebbes* with contempt in Lithuania, Rav Yitzchok Elchonon Spector started signing his name "Yitzchok Elchonon - *melamed*" in order to boost the morale of the *melamdin*. When he was asked how he could humiliate himself like that, he replied simply that "Hashem also calls himself a *melamed*, as we say in the *Birkas HaTorah*: 'who teaches (*melamed*) Torah to His nation Yisroel', and what could bring greater honor to a person than emulating Hashem? I am happy to have such an honorable title".

BENEFITTING FROM THE IGNORANT

"I will not eat until I have spoken my words" (24:33)

On the plain level, Eliezer did not want to eat before saying what he wanted, since he was worried that after eating he would feel an emotional connection with his hosts, and would feel bribed into thinking that this was a good *shidduch*. That is why he wanted to talk about the *shidduch* first before eating.

Alternatively, the *gemoro* says in Sanhedrin (52b), "How is the *talmid chochom* looked upon by the ignorant (*am ho'oretz*)? At first, he appears to him like a golden jug (Rashi: whilst the *talmid chochom* is still behaving honourably, and does not need the *am ho'oretz*, the *talmid chochom* is dear in the eyes of the *am ho'oretz*); if he holds a conversation with him, he appears like one of silver; and if he accepts a benefit from him, he appears like one of clay, which once broken, cannot be mended.

Here too, Eliezer refused to obtain any benefit from Besuel and Lovon before speaking, since he was concerned that if he were to benefit from them, he would lose his esteem in the eyes of these *am haratzim*.

LEAVING THE BEIS HAMEDRASH FOR WEDDINGS

And Yitzchok was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i (24:62)

Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapira brings in the name of Rabbenu Avrohom ben HaRambam that the Torah mentions this detail to teach us that it was only because the time had come

anyway for Yitzchok to return from Be'er Lachai Ro'i (where he engaged in his *avodas Hashem*) that he could go to meet his *kallah*, since this involved no *bittul Torah* or *tefillah*. Otherwise, he would not have gone to meet her.

A *ben Torah* can only burgeon into a *godol beTorah* if he is completely immersed in his learning and does not spend time even going to weddings.

Rav Sternbuch's Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Moshe Schneider would only allow a limited amount of *bochurim* to participate at their friends' weddings. Even if the *chosson* urged his friends to come so that his *simcha* would be complete, Rav Schneider would still not let more than a limited number of boys go. He explained that although it was a big *mitzvah* to be *mesameach* a *chosson*, the departure of a large group of *bochurim* from the Beis Hamedrash would cause the learning of the remaining boys to become weaker, thus causing a public *bittul Torah* and the *mitzvah* to be *mesameach* a *chosson* and *kalla* does not override the *mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah derabbim*.

MATCHMAKING

And Yitzchok was on his way, coming from Be'er Lachai Ro'i (24:62). Rashi: He had gone to bring Hogor to Avrohom his father, that he should marry her.

Perhaps the reason that Yitzchok went specifically at this point in time to bring Hogor to his father is that he was forbidden to leave *Eretz Yisroel* since he had the status of an *olo temimo* (perfect burnt offering). Hence, he could not leave the country to look for a wife himself, and therefore Avrohom was forced to send Eliezer instead. However, Yitzchok wanted to take whatever steps he could on his own to help himself, and so he went to arrange a *shidduch* for his father, in order to arouse merits in *shomayim* for a good *shidduch* for himself. Hashem's conduct works measure for measure. The effort one expends to help a fellow Jew in a certain area arouses merits in Heaven to obtain the same benefit for himself from Hashem.

Yitzchok thereby taught us that if someone wants to find a *zivug* for himself or his children, he should endeavor to help others find theirs, and thereby obtain merits in heaven to find an appropriate *zivug* for himself or his children.

Moreover, Rav Sternbuch heard from the late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, that looking for *shidduchim* for others is a *segula* for meriting worthy children. This appears to be because since he is busy helping others to build a Jewish home, he will also be privileged to establish his own home based on foundations of Torah and *yiroh*, by having worthy children.

A *shadchan* is privileged to fulfil the *mitzvah* of *tzedoko*, because it says in *parshas Re'eh*, "If there will be among you a needy person, from one of your brothers in one of your cities... you shall lend him sufficient for his needs, which he is lacking (15:7-8), on which Rashi comments "what is lacking for him. This refers to a wife (i.e., you should help him marry a wife)".

The Chazon Ish dealt a lot in *shidduchim*, and Rav Sternbuch heard that during the last year of his life he set up 100 (some say 200) Jewish homes.