



I wish to give special thanks to both of my parents, Chaim and Rivkah. I honestly feel that without their combined direction and freedom, my disposition enabling me to take on projects as Mesora and the JewishTimes would not have happened. Our personalities are largely due to those special individuals who made positive and lasting impressions in our youth. They share in their children's successes in a very primary capacity. May we do the same.

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Chayai Sara

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Avraham was old, well advanced in age, and Hashem had blessed Avraham in everything." (Beresheit 24:1)

The Torah tells us that Hashem blessed Avraham in all ways. Nachmanides explains that Avraham had a son. He had wealth and honor. He had achieved old age. There seems to be one blessing omitted from this list. Did Avraham have a daughter?

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Sabbath Observance by Noachides

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Dear Rabbi, Since our decision to follow the 7 Laws which pertain to gentiles, we have quit observing most holidays typically followed here in the US since most of them are derived from Christian or pagan roots.

My children have asked me if there are any holidays we can follow. I have been told that we are allowed to observe some Jewish holidays but I wanted to make certain that this is not something that would be frowned upon by the Jewish community. Could you please tell me what holidays the Noachide community can follow without going against Jewish custom? K&A

Mesora: The Talmud takes up your question. On page 58b in Sanhedrin, the Talmud states, "A non Jew who rests on the Sabbath is punished with death, as it states (when Noach left the ark and sacrificed animals to God as thanks for his rescue, Gen. 8:21-22):

"And God smelled the pleasant scent, and God said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the earth for man's sake, for man's inclination is evil from youth, and I will never again smite all life as I have done. Furthermore, all the days of earth, planting and reaping, cold and hot, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease."

Rashi learns from this verse that God was not simply describing future solar and meteorological phenomena, but He

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Eliezer determines Rebecca's level of kindness by allowing her to respond as she saw fit.

To Love

RIVKA OLENICK

All love that is humanly possible can only exist if one has love of God. Any love relationship between anyone, the foundation of that love, if it is real love can only be if there is love of God. Why is love of God the essence of the human relationship?

We are commanded to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, all thy soul and all thy might" to "love your neighbor as yourself?" and even to "love the stranger." It is difficult to love your neighbor "as yourself" and to love the stranger, so on what basis would you love them or anyone else for that matter unless it were based on the love of God?

Love for other people is based on the understanding that they are like you, your neighbor is you and the stranger was you in Egypt. Both created by God. In one sense it's almost easier to have love of God, since we can see that God created the entire world and everyone and everything in it. How can any person not have this recognition and this great appreciation for all of God's creation? The world as it exists could not have been created by any entity other than God – it seems so obvious. The sky, the moon, the sun, the oceans, all plant and animal life did not "just happen" or evolve as so many foolish people believe. Everywhere you look in the entire universe is the incredible results of God's work that took place on each day of creation. There is no doubt whatsoever to this truth. For thousands of years before we came into existence the world already existed and we are now the benefactors! Does anyone really believe that there is not a Master of the Universe, a Perfect Creator, a Being Who planned all human life from beginning to end including our eternal life?

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Sabbath Observance by Noachides

□ **RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

(Continued from page 1)

was also commanding Noah and all mankind never to cease from planting and harvesting - not even for one day. Rashi states further that this prohibition regarding Noachides is not limited to the Jewish Sabbath, but also applies to a Jewish holiday which may fall out on a Sunday and even applies to a Noachide's proclaiming his day of rest - whether it is a Jewish day of rest or not. In short, any institutionalized day of rest is prohibited to a Noachide by this verse.

There are a few questions which present themselves: 1)What is the concept behind this prohibition? 2)Why such a severe penalty as death? 3)What is the rationale of the Sabbath commanded at Sinai which exempts only Jews from work? 4)Why does this prohibition to cease from reaping the ground come right after Noah's exit of the ark?

This last question directs us to the answer. One may ask, "If man once again reaches the heights of evil equivalent to Noah's generation, should not God act consistently and bring a flood too?" The answer to this question is yes. If man would reach this level, God must be consistent, and flood the earth again. (Rashi teaches that God did in fact flood part of the earth prior to Noah, teaching us that God's perfect justice is consistent.) But the reason God made such a promise is that there was a change in man, so that he would not sink to the evil depths of Noah's generation. Changes in man's physical stature are alluded to in the medrashim. Subsequent to the Flood, man became smaller in stature and required a new covenant, that the animals should fear him. Now that he is not as fearful to the animal kingdom, he needs God's new oath that animals will not attack. Reduction in man's stature minimized man's own ego, the cause of his downfall. God altered man so that he would never stoop to such levels which would bring another flood. Therefore, God can make such an oath and never again bring a flood.

Additionally, God "smelled" Noah's offering demonstrating man's ability to perfect himself and recognize his

Creator, and thank Him through sacrifice. To this, God was pleased and responded, "Man is only evil from youth". Meaning, man can conquer his evil emotions after youth, when his intellect forms much later on. While it is true, the instincts have a head-start, this is no sure win for them. The intellect has a much greater capacity of attracting man's allegiance. Knowledge has the potential to bring to man profound concepts in philosophy that are based on beautiful ideas and proofs. Knowledge which explains many of man's questions, surpassing issues of his earthly existence, and contains far greater attraction than temporal, physical satisfaction offered by the emotions. However, the emotions have their appropriate place in life and cannot be replaced by knowledge alone.

As Man - Noah - demonstrated mankind's ability to live properly, God responds with the seasons and solar phenomena suspended during the Flood, need never again be suspended. God said, "Furthermore, all the days of earth, planting and reaping, cold and hot, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease." When God said planting and reaping shall not cease, He was also addressing man. In other words, God said, "not only won't seasons fail, but man, you must not stop working the earth". What is the concept behind such a command? I believe it means that God wishes mankind to constantly be involved in sustaining God's oath. By man never ceasing any day from work, he thereby demonstrates that there is in fact, produce to be harvested, and rich soil to cultivate. Man publicizes and endorses God's generous oath that the seasons won't cease by man's act of working the fields - each and every day. This prohibition is not limited to Sabbath observance, but aside from vacation time which man needs at times, the Noachide may not formulate days of rest on Holidays as well.

It is a 'reflective' method demonstrating God's mercy on man, that He continually provides food for His creatures. Cessation from such labor is a denial of God's mercy. Such heresy and denial is punishable with death. Noachides observing the Sabbath obscure the lesson that Torah stems from monotheists, i.e., those descendants of Abraham. While it is true that many gentiles may be monotheists, it is not true that all are.

What is an absolute truth is the fact that ALL of Abraham's children partake of his monotheistic heritage. The role of "mankind's teachers" can only be filled by those with the divine directive inherited from the founder, and commanded by God at Sinai. This reputation must not be diluted by others filling such a role. It would obscure God's plan that descendants of a monotheist - Abraham - teach monotheism. As time progressed, and mankind regressed into paganism, God gave a select group of people the Torah. These were the descendants of a man who extricated himself from idolatry. With no teacher other than the world alone, he discovered monotheism. This is God's plan for man, that he relate to God. If one such as Abraham was able to do so, even being raised in an idolatrous culture, then God desired that Abraham be the one personality demonstrating the correct life for mankind. There could be no one better than Abraham to exemplify God's desired lifestyle. For this reason, God chose Abraham's adherents as the guardians of his philosophy. But guarding such an outlook, and Abraham's acts of reaching out to others - is not achieved without hours of pondering the universe. Such pondering requires time, and therefore Abraham's children are afforded this time in the form of the Sabbath. It is not favoritism towards the Jew that he rests on the Sabbath. Rather, it is God's separate consideration that the Jew be commanded in teaching the rest of the world which corrupted itself with pagan beliefs. In order to teach others, the Jew must have the knowledge. Thus, he is commanded that one day each week, his preoccupation with toiling for earthly sustenance must be interrupted.

One may ask, "as Abraham was able to study the world alone and arrive at monotheism, why doesn't the Jew do the same without the Sabbath?" A few reasons could explain the need for a religious system: One is that most of us aren't geniuses like Abraham. We most certainly would not reach his conclusions by viewing the universe. Another more practical reason is that a religion is sustained only when there are laws, a system of precise rules obligating man. Without a strict code of laws that incorporate punitive measures for man's deviation, a system - monotheistic or otherwise - cannot exist for too long. Only a codified system can

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foster a cohesive lifestyle which may go undiluted and continue for thousands of years. Such a precise, divinely created system requires time for investigation, analysis and memorization. The Sabbath is an inherent part of the Torah system.

But doesn't the Jew as well have to claim a testament to God's oath, that season's will endure and man will be provided with food? It now fits why the Sabbath is preempted with a statement, "six days shall you work...." Working six days has nothing to do with Sabbath observance, so why did God see fit to mention it in connection with Sabbath? The answer might be that although the Jew must rest on the Sabbath, nonetheless, he must not stop working on other days. Just as the Noachide must work 7 days, the Jew must work 6 - both aim at the identical promotion that God keeps His word, still providing food until this day. Our working 6 or 7 days is a living testament that God has upheld His promise - His provision of abundance. This act of proof of God's oath is incumbent on Jew and Noachide equally. It is a separate institution of teaching mankind the flaws of paganism, and the Jew must involve himself in exclusive study at least one day a week.

Jews must stop working and learn so they can teach God's people. □

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Satan and Abraham

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Sanhedrin 89b: "And it was after these things, and God tested Abraham." (Genesis 22:1 regarding God's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac).

"Rabbi Yochanan said in Rabbi Yosi ben Zimra's name, 'after these things' refers to 'after the words of Satan'. As it says, 'the lad grew and was weaned.' Upon which Satan said to God, 'Master of the world, this old man (Abraham) you graciously gave a child at 100 years of age. At all his feasts, did he not have one turtle dove or one pigeon to offer to you? God said, 'Has he done this only for his son? If I would say sacrifice your son before me, he would do so.' Immediately 'God tested Abraham saying take 'na' your son.....' Rabbi Simeon ben Abba said 'na' refers only to a pleaded request.' This is allegorical to a earthly king who fought many wars and was victorious through the help of a great warrior. In time, the king was faced with a very strong battle. He pleaded with the warrior, 'stand with me in this battle, so my previous battles won't be disparaged saying there were no previous successes'. So too is the case here, God pleaded with Abraham, 'I tested you with many trials, and you were triumphant in them all. Now, stand though this test so they should not say there were no real triumphs in your previous trials.'"

Was does it mean that God pleaded with Abraham? What is the concept being taught that the purpose in Abraham's trial required sacrificing his son? It seems it is only a response to Satan. Who does Satan represent here?

Sometimes, Satan refers to the person himself, i.e., Abraham. But this is not the case here, as Abraham would not tell God something negative about himself. Who then can Satan refer to here? I believe it is the people of the land, those who seek to mock Abraham.

Upon Abraham "celebrating" his son's physical maturity (weaning), this raised suspicion among the people as to Abraham's true level of perfection. The people (Satan) harbored feelings that Abraham was not as great as he made himself out to be. Perhaps they were astounded at his ability to have a child at 100 years of age. The people of the land were jealous of God's divine intervention with Abraham. Why did this pose such jealousy? People saw someone as righteous as Abraham, being successful in all of his trials. His trials were undoubtedly publicized as the allegory teaches, and such perfection in Abraham conveyed to them in contrast, their own lack of perfection. They were jealous and felt animosity towards Abraham.

Why jealousy and animosity? They sought to degrade his perfection, portraying him no better than they are. Belittling Abraham's triumphs of God's trials, they can now live with themselves. They no longer feel less than perfect, as Abraham himself is not perfect. They can say, "If Abraham couldn't pass the hardest test, he probably didn't pass the easier ones". The people's sentiment - referred to as Satan - harbors the notion that Abraham would not sacrifice Isaac and he could not achieve ultimate perfection. In order to substantiate to the world that man can indeed reach perfection, God "had" to cause Abraham to pass the ultimate test. God's will is that His desired lifestyle for man be shown as an achievable phenomena, not something so lofty that no man can succeed. To teach the world that the 'brass ring' is in fact within man's reach, and man can reach the heights of perfection, God instructed Abraham in this most difficult trial. It is recorded as God "pleading" with Abraham, and to teach us that such a trial is essential for mankind to witness.

We learn that this trial of sacrificing Isaac was not only to actualize Abraham's own perfection,

but more importantly, it was designed to teach us that God's desired perfection for mankind is within reach. When the world sees a man who can perfect himself to such a degree, it removes all rationalizations posed by weaker people, which allowed them to escape from trying harder. Now that Abraham passed this test too, the world must admit that God's plan for man is achievable by all mankind. Abraham's ultimate trial teaches such a valuable lesson, that God's will is achievable.

Our metaphor means that Abraham - the warrior - made God's system successful on many occasions. He followed and taught God's monotheism, and perfected his character traits. But people still felt if Abraham doesn't stand the toughest test, he is nothing. They sought justification for their immoral lives. God 'pleaded' with His warrior to help Him succeed in this great battle - sacrificing Isaac. God could not win the battle Himself, as the only victory (God proving His system as perfect and within man's reach) must be through mortal man and the use of his free will. Only by a man - Abraham - displaying such devotion to God, will God's system emerge victorious. ■



Eliezer Testing Rebecca

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Eliezer was sent by his master Abraham to find a wife for Isaac, Abraham's son. His sworn task was to find a wife from Abraham's family. Eliezer reached Aram Naharayim and stopped at the well, one location where people meet. He prayed to God that He should send him a woman who would not only respond to his request for his own water, but a woman who would initiate hospitality in the form of watering his camels as well, without request.

"And it was as that he had even finished speaking (to God) behold Rebecca came out, born to Besuale, the son of Milka, wife of Nachor, the brother of Abraham and her with her pitcher on her shoulder". (Gen. 24:15)

Of course Eliezer had no knowledge of her lineage, but the Torah teaches how God can prepare most efficiently for the righteous. The prayer was not even complete, yet the response was already at hand.

What happens next catches one's eye, "...she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended. And the servant (Eliezer) ran to greet her and said, 'let me sip please, a little water from your pitcher. And she said, 'drink my master', and she rushed and took down the pitcher from her shoulder and gave him to drink. And when he finished drinking, she said 'I will also draw for your camels until they finish drinking'. And she rushed and emptied her

pitcher into the trough, and she ran yet again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels."

Allow me to focus your attention on a problem, "...she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended. And the servant (Eliezer) ran to greet her..." Pause here for a moment. What strikes you?

What strikes me as I read this is one question, "Why the delay?" There must have been at least 10 minutes which passed as "she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended." It is clear that time passed, yet Eliezer did not budge. His latter sentiment not to delay bringing Rebecca back to Isaac teaches that he was not wasting time. So if he saw her appear as he finished his prayer, why did he not approach her at that very moment? Why did he wait until "she went down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and then ascended?"

Let us better formulate the question: What was there to gain by waiting until Rebecca filled her pitcher? We can refine this question further, "In searching for a woman with the best qualities, what did Eliezer feel he would learn by waiting for Rebecca to fill her pitcher?" The answer is now apparent. Eliezer desired to learn how far Rebecca would go in her kindness. As Eliezer waits until Rebecca draws her own water, her offer is all the more gracious than if

she would draw the water knowingly for another. When one works for herself, there is a connection with the object of their labor. To part with water drawn for herself, Rebecca would display a higher level of kindness. For this reason, Eliezer waited until she drew the water - for herself - and only then asked for it. He intended to see if she would part with water she drew for herself. We see that not only did Eliezer respond to Abraham's request, but he thought into the best manner of responding to his master. Ironically, Eliezer's own perfection mirrors Rebecca's, as they both responded to requests as best they could. Simply responding to a request in kind is not reflective of a high caliber individual. The righteous are perfected. They see a need, and think into the best way to respond. This may very well explain why Eliezer formulated his approach to Rebecca as he did. He too partook of the very kindness he sought in a mate for Isaac.

Notice, Eliezer's request was "let me sip please, a little water from your pitcher". He asked for a little, and received much. Not only did Rebecca give of her own, but she gave more than requested of her, and she gave all he needed, even though it meant watering all his camels, and did so with speed, again, to accommodate as best she could. ■



LOVE AND MARRIAGE □ THE TORAH'S CRITERIA

RIVKA OLENICK

"And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother; he married Rebecca, she became his wife and he loved her; and thus was Isaac consoled after his mother." Genesis 24: 67

It appears that the sentence above contains some unnecessary as well as some needed information. However, this would be contrary to the idea of not adding to or taking away from the Torah since the Torah's statements are all perfect truths. There is an order to the above statements. "And Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother." The word "and" indicates a continuation from Sarah to Rebecca. We already know that Sarah is Isaac's mother yet the Torah states "Sarah his mother." He married Rebecca, she became his wife this seems obvious, yet it was necessary to make two separate statements. "And he loved her; and thus was Isaac consoled after his mother". It was after Isaac married Rebecca she became his wife. And it was after she became his wife that he loved her, not before. Love came after marriage. It also seems obvious that since Isaac married Rebecca and she became his wife, he loved her. Why does the sentence add: "And he loved her?" Is there a difference between love and consolation? Isn't love part of consolation? The dictionary's definition is as follows: "Console- to comfort, to cheer, especially by making up for a loss or disappointment, to give contentment or moderate happiness by relieving from distress." When you love your neighbor as yourself isn't part of that love to also console your neighbor in his/her time of pain and sorrow? Yet the Torah is indicating two separate ideas here:

love and consolation. The Ramban's statement below joins love and consolation together by adding through. And it is through his love for his wife, was he consoled. The Torah does not say "and she loved him and he was consoled". Here Isaac loves Rebecca, and is consoled by her through his love for her. His love for her is not because she loves him - that would be strictly an emotional reciprocation of her love. Rather it was based on her greatness, how she lived her life, her emulation of Sarah. Isaac grieved for his mother and all that she was. He needed comfort from his wife who would continue in the righteousness and deeds of his mother.

The Ramban states: "He found consolation only through his love for his wife." This love was inspired by her righteousness and the aptness of deeds, the only criteria upon which the Torah bases the love between husband and wife". The Ramban says: "only through his love for his wife did Isaac find consolation." Only through his love would mean that he perceives and sees and knows that his love for her is based upon her actions. The same actions that his mother Sarah performed meaning the love and respect he had for Sarah his mother he has for Rebecca. Sarah's tent was not dismantled and Isaac brought Rebecca to his mother Sarah's tent not his tent, indicating that Rebecca would continue Sarah's activities of chesed.

Rashi says: "This is the way of the world; a man is attached to his mother during her lifetime: when she dies he finds comfort in his wife."

When Isaac brought Rebecca into Sarah's tent he saw that Rebecca was like

Sarah in her deeds and in her ways. It was after he brought her into the tent did he observe this himself and he married her. After all, Isaac knew Eliezer was bringing someone for him to marry. He knew that Eliezer was looking for the right person who would fit the profile of a woman of kindness, of chesed. He saw himself that her deeds were righteous. Do people objectively look at the actions of the other person? A person only looks at the actions of another only in relation to themselves. The person asks: "What is this person doing for me? What am I getting?" That's what matters! This is an extremely important point often overlooked by people who are dating. Most people are too caught up in the image and appearance of the other person how the person looks can have such a powerful effect on the other person that negative personality traits are secondary even overlooked and at worst denied. This is a real trap that many people don't know they're in and others can't get out of. Isaac saw what Rebecca was that she was kind and righteous in all her actions, this is what naturally produces love. Love is the result. And supports the Ramban's statement that the only criteria of the Torah regarding love between man and woman is based on how a person lives their life.

Samson Raphael Hirsch adds: "Marriage preceded love, the more they were married, the more Isaac loved her." In this, the first Jewish marriage the Torah illustrates the principle that has generally been followed by Jews." Jewish marriages are contracted not as a result of passion and romance, but as a result of good judgment and sound reason. If the couple is well suited, the marriage will result in love and happiness. Marriages based on pre-marital infatuation, however all too often fail the test of married life. The chapter ends with the words that exalt and ennoble the status of a Jewish wife. Isaac was a mature man when his mother died, but he could not be consoled as long as the sweetness and goodness of the Matriarch was gone from the home. In his wife he found consolation she embodied worth, nobility and greatness. □

To Love

RIVKA OLENICK

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When a person is deceased, the body is attended to with the ultimate care and compassion guided by specific halachas, laws, the body is then returned to the earth. The body is returned to God, the soul is returned to God. This is the will of God even in death, there is compassion and love for His created beings, the selem elokim.

The significant human beings that God brings into the world. This love is given to us through God's Torah knowledge. His laws tell us how we should live most beneficially and incredibly how we are to be cared for even at the time of death, so that we are not frightened and saddened by death. We aren't reduced to a jar of ashes; that is frightening! Christianity completely distorted the idea that "man returns to the dust," by creating a horrendous act against the physical body. It is our maker we are "returned to," not a canister.

God demanded that there be great sensitivity for human life even as we depart from this world. This also demonstrates love for His created beings. He created each of us with a purpose, the same purpose, to live our lives according to His Torah, that instructs us to preserve each other's well being and each other's lives. This instruction assists us in love of God and is also love from God as His creations. Since He created us, He knows better what we are and how we should live.

Isn't it logical that the entire system of Torah was set up according to our true nature, and within our capabilities? Through this system each of us can thrive and reach our maximum potential by internalizing this system? That is also love for His created beings. The more we are immersed in His system through thought and deeds the more love a person naturally has for God. Love is the result. He provided us with the means to achieve a certain happiness in this world by giving us the means to sustain ourselves physically. Simultaneously He gave us the blueprint, the plans, the map, the direction that is all contained in all of the extraordinary ideas of the Torah. Didn't He also implant within our nature the capacity for love, so that it permeates our lives, in all of our relationships with others? We should become more aware of who God wants us to be, the "Klal" and what God wants us to be for those outside of the Klal, the "light." How can a person not have love of God? I say it is impossible. How can a person not love one who has love of God? That is also impossible. In the Shemoneh Esrei, we recite the blessing of peace, Sim Shalom: "Establish peace, goodness, blessing, life, graciousness, kindness and compassion upon us and upon all of Your people Israel. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light of Your countenance, for with the light of Your countenance, You gave us, Hashem, our God, the Torah of life and a love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life, and peace. And may it be good in Your eyes to bless us and to bless all of Your people Israel, in every season and in every hour with Your peace (with abundant strength and peace)." □

Chayai Sara

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 1)

Nachmanides responds to this question. He bases his comments on a discussion in the Talmud. He explains that the Sages dispute this issue. According to Rebbe Meir, Avraham did not have a daughter. Rebbe Yehudah argues that Avraham did have a daughter. A third opinion in the Talmud even provides us with the daughter's name. What is the basis of this dispute between Rebbe Meir and Rebbe Yehudah? Rebbe Yehudah's reasoning seems obvious. The pasuk states that Avraham was blessed in all ways. Rebbe Yehudah concludes that this implies that Avraham had a daughter. Rebbe Meir's opinion is more difficult to understand. If Avraham did not have a daughter, he was not blessed in every way! Nachmanides explains that typically a daughter is a blessing. However, Avraham's situation was not typical. He was the founder of a new, radical philosophy and religion. Very few people fully accepted Avraham's views. He lived in a world dominated by backward heathen beliefs, superstitions and practices. He confronted this issue in searching for a wife for Yitzchak.

He commanded his servant to travel to Aram Naharayim to seek a wife for Yitzchak. The people of Aram Naharayim were idolaters. Yet, Avraham felt that these people were not as primitive as the nations of Canaan. He decided that Yitzchak could find a suitable wife among the citizens of Aram Naharayim. Yitzchak would be able to teach this woman and establish a family committed to serving Hashem. This plan would be far more difficult to execute on behalf of a daughter. Would Avraham be able to find a suitable husband? Would she be able to influence this man to abandon his culture? This would be unlikely in a male dominated society. How could a daughter of Avraham have a happy family life, free of idolatry? Rebbe Meir concludes that Avraham was spared these problems. He did not have a daughter. In his situation, this was a blessing. Now that we understand Rebbe Meir's reasoning, Rebbe Yehudah's argument is not so convincing. How can Rebbe Yehudah insist that a comprehensive blessing must include a daughter? Rebbe Meir has demonstrated that a daughter would have created a dilemma for Avraham. In order to understand this dispute, we must return to an earlier incident.

Hashem commanded Avraham to leave

his homeland and travel to a new land. Hashem promised Avraham that He would bless him. What was the purpose of this blessing? The most obvious possibility is that the blessing was Avraham's personal reward for obeying the Almighty. However, there is another possible explanation of this blessing. The blessing was not a personal reward for Avraham. It was designed to demonstrate to the world Hashem's providence over His servants. It seems that Rebbe Meir and Rebbe Yehudah are debating this very issue. According to Rebbe Meir, the blessing was Avraham's personal reward. Therefore, the specific manifestations of the blessing were based upon Avraham's specific needs. Avraham needed a son. However, a daughter would have created a dilemma. The blessing conformed to Avraham's specific situation. He was granted a son and not a daughter. Rebbe Yehudah agrees that a daughter would have presented tremendous problems for Avraham. However, he argues that this is irrelevant. The blessing was not designed as a reward for Avraham. It was a demonstration to the world. Through the blessing, Hashem displayed the extent of His providence. This required that Avraham have a daughter. It must appear to the world that Avraham's life was perfect and that he possessed every blessing. This could only be accomplished through granting Avraham a daughter.

"And the young woman to whom I will say, 'Tip your jug so that I may drink,' and she will say, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels,' she is the one you have indicated for your servant Yitzchak. And through her I will know that you have acted kindly with my master." (Beresheit 24:14)

Avraham sends his servant Eliezer to Aram Naharayim to seek a wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer arrives at Aram Naharayim. He develops a plan to find a proper wife for Yitzchak. Eliezer devises a test. He will wait at the well for the young women to come draw water for their families. He will approach various young women. He will ask each to share some water with him. He will look for a specific response. He seeks a woman that will agree to share her water with him and will also water his camels. As soon as Eliezer completes the formulation of his plan, Rivka approaches. Eliezer asks her for water. She readily agrees and, without solicitation, offers to water his camels. Eliezer knows that this woman deserves

consideration. She may be the appropriate wife for Yitzchak. Rashi explains that Eliezer was seeking a woman who possessed the characteristic of kindness – chesed. Eliezer's test was designed to identify this characteristic. It follows that from his test, we can extract Eliezer's definition of kindness.

Let us analyze the test devised by Eliezer. The test required that the woman perform two acts. First, she must respond positively to Eliezer's request for water. Second, she must make an unsolicited offer to provide water for his camels. Clearly, this unsolicited offer is also essential to identifying the characteristic of chesed. What does this behavior reveal to us about chesed? Chesed is not merely responding to the requests of another. Chesed requires that we look beyond the individual's requests. We must evaluate the actual needs of the person. Rivka demonstrated this behavior. Eliezer asked for water for himself. Many people would respond positively to such a request. However, this response by itself does not exemplify chesed. Chesed requires taking the next step. Rivka asked herself, "What else does this traveler need?" She realized that he also needed water for his camels. She immediately offered to provide this water.

Rivka again demonstrates this same attribute of chesed later in the encounter. Eliezer asks Rivka if there is any space in her father's home for him to lodge. Rivka answered that there is room. However, she does not stop with this positive response to Eliezer's question. She realizes that Eliezer has other needs that he has not mentioned. She immediately adds that these needs will also be met. Eliezer will be provided with straw and fodder. Eliezer had not asked for straw and fodder. However, this is the very essence of chesed. Rivka identified the needs of Eliezer and addressed these needs, and not merely Eliezer's stated requests.

"These were the sons of Yishmael. And these were the names given to their towns and encampments. There were twelve princes for their nation." (Beresheit 25:16.)

The parasha ends with a discussion of Yishmael and his descendants. Why is this discussion included in the Torah? The Torah tells the story of Bnai Yisrael. Why is the history of Yishmael included? This same question applies to the Torah's treatment of Esav and his descendants. In Parshat VaYishlach, the Torah discusses at

length Esav's descendants. Why is this discussion included in the Torah? At the simplest level, these discussions demonstrate the fulfillment of Hashem's promises regarding Yishmael and Esav. Hashem promised Hagar that Yishmael, her son, would be the progenitor of a great nation. This promise was also communicated to Avraham. Similarly, Hashem revealed to Rivka that Esav would be the source of a nation. These discussions show that Yishmael and Esav did produce nations. The promises were fulfilled.

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Ztl – the GRIZ – offers a further explanation of these discussions. Maimonides explains that only the descendants of Yaakov – Bnai Yisrael – are the spiritual heirs of Avraham. In other words, although the descendants of Yishmael and Esav are the biological progeny of Avraham, they are not his spiritual heirs. This is because Hashem had foretold Avraham that his children would experience exile. This certainly occurred to Bnai Yisrael. We were exiled to Egypt. However, the descendants of Yishmael and Esav never experienced exile. Only Bnai Yisrael experienced the fate reserved for Avraham's heirs. This indicates that we are the true spiritual descendants of Avraham. Based on these comments, the GRIZ explains these portions of the Torah. The discussion of Yishmael and his descendants indicates that they achieved permanent possession of their territories. They did not experience exile. Similarly, the discussion of Esav describes the lands conquered by Esav's children and their permanent settlement of these lands. The Torah is telling us that neither of these nations experienced exile. Therefore, they cannot be defined as Avraham's heirs. □

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Mesechet Baba Batra 141a. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 24:1. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 24:14. Sefer Beresheit, chapter 36. Sefer Beresheit, 16:10. Sefer Beresheit, 21:13. Sefer Beresheit, 25:23. Sefer Beresheit, 15:13. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Nedarim, 3:9. Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, Chidushai MaRan RIZ Hal'eyve on the Torah, Parshat Chayai Sara.

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