



שמע קולנו

Volume XVII, Issue 8 The Weekly Torah Publication of the Yeshiva University High School for Boys 22 Cheshvan 5772 ◊ November 19, 2011

I AM A STRANGER AND RESIDENT AMONG YOU

Rabbi Mordechai Brownstein

“One is either a ‘stranger’, an alien, or one is a ‘resident’, a citizen. How could Avraham claim both identities for himself? Avraham’s definition of his dual status, we believe, describes with profound accuracy the historical position of the Jew who resides in a predominantly non-Jewish society. He was a resident, like other inhabitants of Canaan, sharing with them a concern for the welfare of society, digging wells, and contributing to the progress of the country in loyalty to its government and institutions. Here, Avraham was clearly a fellow citizen, a patriot among compatriots, joining others in advancing the common welfare. However, there was another aspect, the spiritual, in which Avraham regarded himself as a **stranger**. His identification and solidarity with his fellow citizens in the secular realm did not imply his readiness to relinquish any aspects of his religious uniqueness. His was a different faith and he was governed by perceptions, truths, and observances which set him apart from the larger faith community. In this regard, Avraham and his descendants would always remain “**strangers**”.(Reflections of the Rav)

The Rav attempts with this commentary to mitigate a difficulty in the text that is the focus of Rashi and Ibn Ezra: Namely, how can one be described as both alien stranger and resident citizen? Rashi, followed by Sforno and Rashbam, explain that Avraham was a stranger that wanted to settle there, to be a citizen, and therefore, claimed the rights to the land. Ibn Ezra views the two terms as one phrase *ger toshav*, ‘a stranger who resides among you’. It would appear the Rav’s commentary follows the Ibn Ezra’s interpretation. Avraham is the *ivri*, the one who takes the other side in the great debate – the non-conformist with the culture around him; and though he is concerned about the weal and woe of the state he lives in and, indeed participates in its achievements, he retains his unique identity and does

not trade the sacred for the temporal. The Rav sees in Avraham the prototype Jew. The Jew in Germany, America, Great Britain, Canada etc.

חיי שרה
Chayei Sarah

It would be of interest to compare and contrast this interpretation with one of the *Torat Chacham*.

“I am not certain how I am viewed in your midst, *ger* or *toshav*. With this [request] it can be determined: If you will give me a burial site in your midst, it is an indication that I am [accepted] as a citizen like all other citizens. If, however, [the burial site is not] in your midst, even if it is a gift, that would be an indication [that to you] I am still a stranger.” (R’ Chaim ben R’ Avraham. Student of R’ Chaim Vital.)

Avraham is not certain of how, to what degree, the society around him perceives and accepts him. According to this interpretation, Avraham is steadfast in his own commitments but does not yet know how he is viewed by the locals; is he alien or compatriot, different or integrated. Again, the inference is made to the prototype Jew, the wanderer, without a state of his own, who can settle into and find some degree of satisfaction, even thrive in a society that stands on the other side of the great debate.

What is that great debate which divides Avraham from the rest, the roaring river which forms the partition that defines Avraham’s legacy?

“And He knew that there is one G-d,
And He directs the [celestial] spheres [directs nature],
And He created everything,
And there isn’t in all existence another god,
And He **knew** everyone else is **mistaken.**” (Rambam hil’ Avodah Zarah Ch. 1)

The great debate rages in Avraham’s mind and heart. There, inside, in his inner world he knows the truth. Everyone else is mistaken!

Visibly, Avraham is a citizen; in his mind and heart though, Avraham is a stranger for “everyone else is mis-

taken”.

How long will Avraham, the lonely man of faith on the other side of the great debate, remain a stranger, alien to the surrounding culture?

“*And the settlement of the children of Israel that settled in Egypt 430 years. And it came to pass, at the end of 430 years, and it was on that very day, all the hosts of G-d left the land of Egypt.*” (Shmos 12: 40 – 41)

“*This pasuk is difficult to understand! We do not find [in Scripture] Israel in Egypt 430 years!*

Our Rabbis, ob”m, explain this tally [begins] from Avraham’s departure from his country and birthplace (Mechilta parshas Bo ch. 14) immediately reducing him to the status of a stranger in the land of Canaan, as it states, “I am a stranger and resident among you”. (Maharal, Gevuros Hashem ch. 38)

The term ‘stranger’, *ger*, carries a message not limited to the wanderer on the other side of the great debate, living among the mistaken else of the side opposite to his, defining his lonely self as a citizen politically, a loyal patriot of his country but as a stranger never-the-less because of faith and tradition. The term ‘stranger’ also speaks of the length of his exile, the duration of his dual attitude until that time when all will inhabit the same side of that great debate and the debate will cease to divide Avraham from the mistaken other.

SARAH AND ESTHER—LIVES OF FULLNESS

Yehuda Tager

In this week’s Parshah, Sarah passes away at the age of 127 years. The Medrash tells us that Esther merited ruling 127 provinces because of the 127 years that Sarah lived for. On a simple level, this means that the provinces of Esther were a reward for Sarah’s righteous life. However, we know that Esther did not want to marry Achashverosh, and that Esther was not allowed to build the Beis HaMikdash, the main project she would have liked to do as queen. Therefore we must ask, how is this reward proper for Sarah, whose life was so well used and devoted to Hashem? Furthermore, why is it that Esther was the one chosen to receive this reward?

In discussing Sarah’s life, the Pri Etz states that Sarah spent her 127 years devoted to her mission of serving Ha-

shem and spreading Torah throughout the world. Therefore it makes sense, as Targum Yonasan relates that when she heard Yitzchak was sacrificed, it distressed her because she thought her legacy of spreading Torah to the world was cut off. This is why she was rewarded with Esther, who was given her position as queen in order to save B’nei Yisroel and preserve that very legacy in all 127 provinces over which she ruled.

Perhaps we can take this a step further. The Medrash says that the Sh’china was present in Avraham’s tent in Sarah’s honor and the Aggudas Esther states that even before Achashverosh knew that she was Jewish, Esther convinced him to set up a place for Mordechai and the Sanhedrin at the palace gate, thereby bringing the Shechinah into her house as well. We now see the reason why Esther was worthy of fulfilling Sarah’s destiny, as they both brought spirituality with them and filled their homes with it. Thus, Esther was able to rejuvenate B’nei Yisroel both physically and spiritually with the downfall of Haman and “*Kiyumu V’Kiblu Hayehudim*”- the reacceptance of the Torah after the Purim salvation.

This Pri Etz states that Avraham told Sarah that he was taking Yitzchak to learn by Shem and Ever when he brought him to the Akaidah. This shows us Sarah’s willingness to give up the things that matter most, as she did not question Avraham when he wanted to take Yitzchak to learn Torah, despite the grief that it caused her. R’ Zilberstein says that this selflessness exists in her descendants to this day. Esther suffered at the hand of Achashverosh, but did so to save her people. R’ Aharonson tells an amazing story set in Nazi Germany. The officers ordered a group of Jews to bury the dead bodies in their camp. As they buried the bodies, the Rav among them noticed a live Jew. He told his companions not to bury him, as one may not quicken the death of a fellow Jew. The officer told the Rav to bury the Jew, but the Rav, instead of complying, took off his shirt, pointed to his heart, and said: “You are welcome to shoot me in the heart, but I will not bury a live Jew.”

These 2 ideas are not contradictory, as the shock that Sarah experienced is reasonable, because one should care

deeply about his or her mission in life and even its preservation for future generations. Thus, the shock was not due to a deficiency in her Emunah, rather, it was a symbol of her devotion to Hashem. He should grant us all the strength to follow these examples, and we should have the Z'chus to yearn to do what's right, at all costs.

EMUNAH AND BITACHON

Philip Meyer

"Vatamas Sarah Bikiryas Arbah he Chevron bieretz Canaan vayavo Avraham lispod lisarah vilivkosah"

This week's parsha begins with the death of Sarah. The Torah tells us that Sarah passed away in Chevron and that Avraham came to eulogize and to mourn her. The phrase *vayavo Avraham*, according to the Ramban, could mean that Avraham came to Chevron from some other place after hearing about Sarah's death. Where then was Avraham and why wasn't he with Sarah at the time of her death? The Ramban says, based on Rashi's comments on this pasuk, that Avraham was still at Har Hamoriah. Rashi explains the comments of the midrash and says that since the death of Sarah at the beginning of this week's parsha, immediately follows the story of Akeidas Yitzchak at the end of last week's parsha, shows that these events are connected. We can learn that through hearing the news that her son was almost sacrificed, Sarah died.

The literal explanation of the comments of the midrash could be difficult to understand. Could the midrash be saying that Sarah's reaction to the akeida was dying of shock at the news that her son was to be slaughtered to fulfill Hashem's commandment to Avraham? Avraham on the one hand was willing and eager to fulfill Hashem's commandment, and Sarah's death, on the other hand, seems to indicate that Sarah either had a lack of bitachon, or some hesitation regarding Avraham fulfilling this mitzvah. This would seem to be a negative reflection on Sarah. We would think that Sarah's reaction should have been equal to or even greater than Avraham's excitement and enthusiasm. As Rashi said in his earlier comments in Berai-shis 28:12, Sarah's greatness in prophecy exceeded that of Avraham.

Rav Matisyahu Blum, in his sefer Tora Ladaas, quotes the Kehillas Yitzchak to explain that Sarah's death was not a reflection of her righteousness, or lack thereof, chas v'sha-

lom, but rather was part of Avraham's test. We can understand this from the sequence of the pesukim. The first Pasuk in this parsha tells us about the number of years of Sarah's life. The Satan had previously tried to prevent the akeida. When that didn't work, he tried something else. He knew that Sarah's time of death was here. The Satan planned that at the very time of Sarah's death he would be telling her about the akeida. Therefore, it would seem that the Akeida was the cause of Sarah's death. He thought Avraham would be so upset, that he would re-think about doing the Akeida, or regret doing it. The Gemara in Kiddushin teaches us that a person loses his reward for a mitzvah already performed if he regrets having done the mitzvah. But actually, Avraham withstood the test of the Satan. According to Rabbi Yisroel Ciner, Avraham eulogized Sarah with all the things she had done for him and for the whole world, he acknowledged the tremendous loss and void formed by her death, and only then did he cry. The small *kof* in the word *vilivkosa* implies that Avraham's cry was not bitter over a tragic death. He cried as one cries for an older person who's time has come but will be missed. Furthermore, Rav Matityahu Blum quotes the Kehillas Yitzchak further, explaining that the small *kof* indicates Avraham's minimal crying and continued zeal to fulfill Hashem's commandments. Avraham's ability to cope with Sarah's death was his knowledge that she was part of the *nisayon* given to him by Hashem, which ultimately made him appreciate Sarah's righteousness even more and view her death as an integral part of his mitzvah.

Another view on this pasuk is taken by Rabbi Aaron Lewin in his sefer HaDrash VeHaEyun, where he explains that the words *vayavo Avraham lispod lisarah* could be understood as at what point in Sarah's life Avraham began his eulogy. He explains that Avraham began with the story of the Akeida. This fact alone, that Sarah succeeded in bringing up a son to be willing to sacrifice his own life for Hashem, showed what type of person she was.

Rabbi Gil Elmaleh explains that we can learn from the lessons of Avraham and Sarah to recognize that everything that happens both the good and what might seem bad, is part of a person's individual "*nisayon*" and is all part of Hashem's ultimate plan.

***** Weekly YU Contributor *****

THE SERENITY OF SATISFACTION

Shaya First

One of the many functions of Sefer Breishis is to trace the history of B'nei Yisrael's foundation. In doing so, the Torah goes out of its way to detail the lives of each of the Avos. Of particular interest are the points of transition, where the Torah has the chance to highlight a particular quality as it concludes its discussion of one forefather and moves onto the next. One such changeover occurs near the end of this week's parsha, as the p'sukim describe the death of Avraham Avinu: "*vayigva vayamas Avraham biseiva tovah **zaken visaveia** vayeiasef el amav*". Although the general meaning of this pasuk is fairly clear, one is left to wonder-what precisely does it mean that Avraham died "*saveia*"? To clarify this ambiguity, it is worthwhile to compare this pasuk with a few similar p'sukim found in Tanach. In describing the death of Yitzchak, the Torah states (35:29), "*vaigva Yitzchak vayamas vayeiasef el amav zakein usva yamim*". Here, the word *yamim* is employed to clarify the "satiation" being described. Many Meforshim (e.g. Radak, R' Saadiah Gaon, and Abarbanel) interpret the *saveia* mentioned by Avraham in this light as well— Avraham died "satiated" with days, or in other words lived for a very long time. Such a reading can perhaps draw support from the perpetual proximity of the term to *zikhah* and *seivah* throughout Tanach, both terms referring to old age.

However, other Meforshim interpret the term *saveia* as it appears in both contexts- by Yitzchak and by Avraham-in a slightly different manner. They explain the term based on how it appears in the context of David Hamelech's passing in Divrei Hayamim (29:27): "*vayamas biseiva tovah siva yamim osher vichavod vayimloch Shlomo bino tachtav*". Here, the term *siva* is modified not merely by days, but also by wealth and honor, symbolic of all worldly pleasures. According to the Ramban, the unmodified term *saveia* appearing by Avraham alludes to satiation from all of these blessings: Avraham died laden with wealth, honor, and longevity. The Ramban and ibn Ezra (Iyov 42:17) go so far as to say that even when the term *siva* is modified by *yamim*, as it is in the case of Yitzchak, satiation with wealth and honor are implied as well. Interestingly, the Rabbeinu Bachya (25:8) actually distinguishes between the *saveia* found by Avraham and the *siva yamim* found by Yitzchak,

implying that only the former is implicitly modified by wealth, honor and longevity.

At first glance, whatever the objects of *saveia* may be, the message of these p'sukim seems abundantly clear: Hashem blesses the lives of tzaddikim. The Ramban, however, adds another dimension: "*hu sippur chasdei Hashem bitzaddikim umiddah tovah bahem shelo yisavu bimutaros*" The Torah is not merely describing the reward that Hashem bestowed upon Avraham, Yitzchak, and David, but is also noting their *own* satisfaction with what Hashem had given them.

Even Yaakov, the only one among the Avos who the Torah does not go out of its way to describe as *saveia* upon death, possessed this quality. In Parshas Vayishlach, as Yaakov and Esav encounter one another for the first time since childhood and are describing to each other what they have become, Esav uses the term "*yesh li rav*" to describe his wealth and possessions. *rav* is a term that connotes abundance, but one which does not indicate any level of satisfaction or "satiation." Yaakov, by contrast, describes himself through the term "*yesh li kol*"-I have everything that I need.

The lives of the Avos are meant to serve as models for our own lives. We should strive to emulate the middos they mastered and values they embodied, and in doing so we will maximize our service of Hashem. When the Torah goes out of its way to emphasize the presence of a middah in each of the three Avos, one can be confident that it is one worth emulating. In the words of the Ramban at the beginning of Parshas Vayishlach, "*rauy lanu le'echoz bidarko shel tzaddik*" – it is fitting for us to follow in the ways of tzaddikim.

Editors in Chief: Meir Finkelstein, Yoni Schwartz

Menahel: Rabbi Michael Taubes

Rabbinic Advisor: Rabbi baruch Pesach Mendelson

Tech Staff Chief: Philip meyer

Questions? Comments?

Email us at shemakoleinu1@gmail.com

Complaints?

Email Avi Lent at Avi.lent@optonline.net