



Parshas Chayei Sarah 2022, sphere of influence

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with the passing of Sarah at 127 years old. Avraham negotiated with Ephron to buy a plot of land in Chevron, known as Mearas HaMachpelah, for 400 shekels. This cave would be a family burial plot for the next generations.

When Avraham finished mourning for Sarah, he sent his most trusted servant, Eliezer, to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. When Eliezer arrived in the city, he prayed to G-d to have mercy on him and show him the future wife of Yitzchak. The test he formulated was if the girl would offer him and his camels water to drink.

Eliezer then headed to the city's well and encountered a young girl carrying a water jug on her shoulder. When he approached her and requested water, she gave him water to quench his thirst. But she also offered to provide water to his many camels to drink.

When Eliezer asked who she was, he discovered that her name was Rivkah, and she was a great-niece of Avraham; at that moment, he knew she would marry Yitzchak. Rivkah ran home to tell her family about Eliezer and his mission to find Yitzchak, a wife. Her brother Lavan quickly went outside to greet Eliezer and invited him to stay the night. The following day, Eliezer and Rivkah traveled back together to Cana'an.

When Yitzchak met Rivkah, he brought her into his mother's tent to see if the miracles of her tent would return. While Sarah was alive, her candles remained illuminated from Friday afternoon to Friday afternoon.

Her dough stayed fresh and miraculously increased as needed. Most importantly, a cloud of G-d hovered over her tent. But all these incredible Miracles vanished when Sarah passed away.

Yet, when Rivkah entered Sarah's tent, all the miracles returned. Once again, the cloud of G-d hovered over the tent. Her candles burned the entire week and her dough never finished. When Yitzchak saw the miracles return, he knew she was one to continue his amazing mother's legacy.

The Torah portion concludes with Avraham giving all his possessions to Yitzchak before passing away at 175 years old. Yitzchak and Ishmael buried Avraham next to Sarah in the Mearas HaMachpelah in Chevron. Many people have the custom of spending this Shabbos in Chevron by the Mearas HaMachpelah.

However, a question comes to mind: After meeting Eliezer at the well, Rivkah runs home to tell her family about Eliezer and his mission. Seemingly happy for her, they said to Eliezer (24:51), *"take her and go, and let her be a wife for your master's son."* But when Eliezer attempts to leave the following day, they try to prevent him from going. What changed overnight that switched their attitude and made them reconsider their opinion about Rivkah leaving with Eliezer? Why the sudden change of mind?!

The Alshich Hakadosh (*Rav Moshe Alshich, a commentary from the holy city of Tzafet*) gives an interesting explanation. He writes that Rivkah's family purposely tried to prevent Eliezer from going because they were disappointed with their gifts.

Eliezer gave many valuable and beautiful presents to Rivkah individually, but her family did not receive the same gifts. They hoped that by preventing Eliezer from leaving, they would receive gifts of similar value and beauty as Rivkah's.

However, the Chizkuni (*Rav Chezekiah ben Manoah, a French Rabbi from the 13th century*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation.

He quotes Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) that Besueil, Rivkah's father, poisoned Eliezer's food so he could take all of his possessions. But G-d had a different plan. He sent an angel who switched their plates, killing Besueil instead.

The Chizkuni explains that once Eliezer saw the wickedness and depravity that surrounded Rivkah, he needed to move her from that situation. He realized that Rivkah's holiness and belief in G-d were despite her family's immorality and sinfulness. Hence, Eliezer wanted to leave as soon as possible to help Rivkah detach from her wicked family.

But when her family realized Eliezer's intention, they protested and tried to keep Rivkah from leaving with him. They wanted Rivkah to stay with them and continue to learn from their wicked and sinful actions.

The lesson the Chizkuni learns from Eliezer's abrupt departure is that although the community is at the core of Judaism, it is not everything. The Chizkuni explains that if they try to influence us negatively, we must remove ourselves from their sphere of influence. We should withdraw and sever any connection to people trying to reduce and diminish our connection to G-d. For a holy and honorable community made up of G-d-fearing, kind and honest people.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we realize that we are whom we surround ourselves with. Whether they are friends or family, the people around us have an immense impact on us. They can weaken our resolve and demoralize our spirit to the point of no return. They can discourage and prevent us from achieving our potential.

On the other hand, they can strengthen our determination and encourage us to go after our dreams and be successful. They can inspire and motivate us when we are down and support us while we achieve our G-d-given potential. The community and people we surround ourselves with will dictate our growth or lack thereof.

**"The greatness of the community is most accurately measured by the
compassionate actions of its members."**

*Have a meaningful Shabbos!
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*