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שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 25 October 2013 - 21 Cheshvan 5774
Sedra Chayei Sarah

CONNECTING HIGHER AND LOWER

THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY FOCUSED ON THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT, their own study, even their own spiritual attainment. In a sense, they reach for higher worlds. Yet they do not seem very concerned about the “lower” world around them, their neighbours or the wider community. By contrast there are people who devote their lives to helping others, but seem relatively unconcerned about their own development.

This second type are clearly very good people, heavily involved with all kinds of practical efforts to improve the “lower” world, but they do not seem to have the time or the opportunity to reach for something higher, something beyond.

The ideal in Jewish teaching is a combination of both. This is expressed by a phrase in the Sedra¹, speaking of our great ancestor, Abraham.

After describing the sad passing of his life-long wife, Sarah, and her burial in Hebron, the Torah tells us that “Abraham was old, coming on in days”² as a prelude to the story of finding a wife for his son Isaac.



In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin
(Yenta bas Devora) ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772
Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
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Why does the Torah repeat what seems to be the same idea? “Old” and “coming on in days” are apparently saying the same thing.

The Talmud³ explains the word “old” as meaning “acquiring wisdom”. When the Torah describes someone as “old” it does not necessarily mean in years. It means that this person devotes himself or herself to spiritual matters, to gaining knowledge of the sacred Torah, to “upper” worlds.

By contrast, “coming on in days” has to do with the effect of the person on the world around them. The “days” are the days of this lower world, with all their practicalities and complications. The phrase expresses the idea that the person has given the right input to each “day” in terms of the practicalities of life, including efforts for the welfare of others, charity, practical Mitzvot.

The unique quality of Abraham was his ability to combine spiritual reaching towards higher worlds together with practical efforts regarding the lower world. Hence Abraham began the process leading to the Giving of the Torah, an event which joined together “higher” and “lower”.

For example, when a kitchen is run according to the sacred laws of Kashrut, the practical world - the kitchen - is being infused with holiness. This process began with Abraham, with the Covenant of circumcision, which brought holiness to his physical body.

In the life of a Jew today, the upper world is expressed by Prayer and Torah study and every attempt to climb higher in one’s own spiritual life. The lower world is that of practical Mitzvot, including and especially charity, and all attempts to help others and the community.

The message of this phrase about our ancestor Abraham is that we need to strive for both qualities. Through this we reach the ideal of the Torah: that each one of us should, personally, as individual men and women, connect with G-d; and also that, at the same time, empowered by this connection, we should do our best to bring goodness to the world.

1. Genesis 23:1-25:18. 2. Gen 24:1. 3. Kiddushin 32b. “Old”, *zaken*, is explained as implying *zeh kana chochmah* “this person acquired wisdom”. 4. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.3, p.774 ff.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA CHAYEI SARAH

BECOMING LIKE REBECCA

“Oh yummy! Those are my absolutely favourite type of sweets! Could I have some Avigail?” It was the new girl in the class, a plump, freckled, friendly type of person called (rather incredibly) Keren Kerinsky, who found Avigail in a corner of the playground with a large bag of colourful jelly beans. Avigail frowned - she had come to this corner to avoid sharing her jelly beans. “OK,” she said reluctantly, “but don’t tell anyone I gave you otherwise I won’t have any left.”

Later that day, during the weekly arts and crafts session, the girl next to her dropped a large jar containing hundreds or even thousands of plastic beads, dispersing them far and wide over the floor. Avigail was not one of the people who offered to help pick them up. Why should she? She couldn’t be bothered.

“Avigail! Could you help me bring the shopping in from the car?” her mother called that evening at home. Avigail was playing Monopoly with her cousin Gila and pretended not to hear.

A few days later she was at Gila’s house. “Wow, what a mess! It’s usually so tidy here. What happened?” she asked her cousin in surprise, when they came downstairs to the kitchen to get a drink. Gila explained that her mother had the flu, so everything was a bit upside down. Avigail looked at the sink overflowing with dishes, and at the messy counter.

Suddenly she said “Why don’t I do the washing up - I’m sure your mother would appreciate that!”

“OK. I’m really supposed to tidy up here, so it would be great to have some help.” Gila looked at her cousin in surprise. “Avigail, this is a bit unlike you, you know. You’ve never offered to help and even if you’re asked you usually say no.”

Avigail reddened a little. “I know,” she said. “I know I’ve always been a bit like that, never helping out or sharing my things, but it was hearing about Rebecca that made me want to change my behaviour.”

“Rebecca? Oh, do you mean Rebecca who married Isaac? The one we just learned about in the Sedra?”

“Yes. Remember. Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to find a wife for his son Isaac. But Eliezer was worried - how would he know who was the right girl? So he decided that if he would see a girl who was kind--hearted, who would agree to give him water and would also offer to bring water for his camels, then this must be the right one. And that’s what happened - all the girls of the city came out, and one of them was so nice that she offered to draw water not only for him but also for all his camels. So Eliezer knew that this girl, who was Rebecca, and was from the family of Abraham, was the right one. So she and Isaac got married.

“Anyway, that got me thinking. I realized how important it is to be like Rebecca. I suddenly thought, if I would have been there, Eliezer wouldn’t have chosen me, because I would never have offered to help. So I decided to try and become more helpful and kind, and less selfish. I hope I succeed!”

“Of course you will!” said Gila. “You make me feel inspired! And it’s wonderful of you to help with the washing-up... My mother will be really happy.”

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