



Wembley Synagogue

חיי שרה

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Chaye Sarah

וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְשָׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה - And the lifetime of Sarah was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years – the years of the lifetime of Sarah (23:1)

The Midrash in Bereshit Rabbah 58:3 relates that Rabbi Akiva was once teaching his students when he noticed some of them falling asleep. In an effort to regain their interest, he told them that Esther, being descended from Sarah who lived one hundred and twenty seven years, merited becoming queen over one hundred and twenty seven provinces.

Why did Rabbi Akiva use these words to arouse his students? The Chidushei HaRim (Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Alter 1799-1866), suggests that Rabbi Akiva wished to impress upon his students the importance of every minute and the obligation to use one's time to its greatest advantage. It was precisely because all of Sarah's one hundred and twenty seven years were perfect that her descendent Esther ruled over one hundred and twenty seven provinces. The lesson that Rabbi Akiva wanted to impart was that we are each presented with the fleeting gift of time and the challenge of utilising it well. The implied admonition in Rabbi Akiva's words was intended to restore his students to full attention. (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

The Parsha Anthology)

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Ginsburg (1885-1946) in his Yalkut Yehudah finds another dimension in Rabbi Akiva's choice of words. Rabbi Akiva lived at a time of great persecution when the Romans forbade the teaching of the Torah. (Indeed we know that Rabbi Akiva himself was executed for doing so.) It was inevitable that the morale of his students would suffer during such times. Rabbi Akiva therefore reminded them that Esther, too, lived at a difficult time and yet she ruled over one hundred and twenty seven provinces and in what merit? In the merit of Sarah who lived many centuries earlier. Rabbi Akiva therefore assured his students that even if they would have difficulty seeing the fruits of their hard work now, they could be sure that the merits of their studies would be realised eventually.

וַיָּבֵא אַבְרָהָם לְסִפּוֹד לְשָׂרָה וַלְבִתָּהּ - And Avraham came to eulogise Sarah and weep for her. (23:2)

Rashi comments: "The narratives of Sarah's death and the Binding of Yitzchak follow one another, for through the announcement of the Binding, that her son had been prepared for slaughter and had almost been slaughtered, her soul departed from her and she died."

Why would a righteous woman like Sarah die upon hearing that her son was prepared for slaughter for the sake of Hashem? On the contrary, she should have been proud!

When Sarah heard of Avraham's mission to Mount Moriah, she marveled at his spiritual heroism. Had she been told that Yitzchak had been sacrificed, she would have been filled with joy at the fact that her son was accepted by Hashem. She was told however, that he had *almost* been slaughtered. Upon hearing this, she was terribly saddened, because she presumed that at the last moment her son was found unsuitable. Sarah feared that perhaps her influence was in some way inadequate and her education of Yitzchak imperfect. This thought had such a profound effect on her that her soul departed. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

Why is the word *וַלְבִתָּהּ* *velivkotah* — "and weep for her" written with a small *kaf*? Avraham in addition to having a son, Yitzchak, also had a daughter named "Bakol" (*Bava Batra* 16b). When Avraham went with Yitzchak to Mount Moriah, she remained home with her mother. When Sarah died upon hearing about Yitzchak and the *Akeidah*, her daughter, Bakol, also died. The word *velivkotah* alludes to the above. Without the *kaf* it is *u'lebitah* (and for her daughter) and with the *kaf* it is *velivkotah* which means to "cry over her." Avraham did both: He wept for her (Sarah) and also *u'lebitah* (for her daughter who died at the same time). According to *Ba'al Haturim*, the small *kaf* is to emphasize that Avraham did not mourn her extensively (because she was old and had lived a full life.) The opinion that the *Akeidah* took place on *Yom Kippur* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 29:9) may explain his restraint. From Avraham's house it took three days to reach Mount Moriah, as stated, "on the third day he saw the place from afar" (22:4). Thus, when Avraham returned from the *Akeidah*, he travelled the 11th, 12th and 13th days of *Tishrei*, and Sarah's funeral took place on *Erev Sukkot*, the 14th day of *Tishrei*. Since he was able to observe mourning only one day (until *Succot*), he was unable to cry for very long. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

מְעַרְתַּת הַמַּכְפֵּלָה - The Cave of Machpela (23:9) – *The Cave of Redoubling*

The Gemara Eiruvim 53b says regarding the Cave of Machpela, there is a dispute amongst Rav and Shmuel. One said it comprised of two chambers, one inside the other. The other said it comprised of a main chamber and an attic on top of it. According to the one who said it was made up of two chambers one on top of the other, it is clear what is meant by "redoubling." If however you go according to the one who says it was a main chamber with an attic on top of it, what did he mean by "redoubling?"

It was redoubled with couples. Rabbi Yitzchok said that it was the town of four couples: Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchok and Rivkah and Yaakov and Leah. (Source: Talmudic Illuminations)

לִי בְכֹסֶף מְלֵא יִתְּנֶנָּה לִי - Let him sell me the Machpeilah Cave...for its full price. (23:9)

Efron was originally willing to give the land as a gift. Why didn't Avraham agree to take it as a gift or at a discounted price?

Avraham knew that in the Cave of Machpeilah Adam and Chava were already buried and that another six holy people would be buried there. Avraham wanted to make sure that Efron should have absolutely no merit whatsoever or be able to take pride that he helped a *tzaddik* in any way. Therefore, he insisted on paying the full price without any discounts. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וְה' בֵרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכֹל - And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything (24:1)

Rashi tells us that the numerical value of **בְּכֹל** (*Bakol* – with everything) is 52, equals the numerical value of **בֵּן** (*ben* – son), indicating that the blessing the verse speaks of is Yitzchak, Avraham's son.

One Sukkot, the Vilna Gaon was sitting in his sukkah with several guests. He asked them, “from where do we know that Avraham fulfilled the mitzvah of sukkah?” His guests sat in silence and could not think of the answer. Said the Gaon, the Midrash tells us **וְה' בֵרַךְ אֶת אַבְרָהָם בְּכֹל** - And Hashem blessed Avraham with everything – the word *bakol* – refers to the mitzvah of sukkah. Where do we find any reference to the mitzvah of sukkah in this verse? Examine the word ***bakol*** said the Gaon. Its three letters allude to the three verses that describe the mitzvah of sukkah:

(ב) ***Basukkot teshvu shivat yamim*** – you shall live in sukkot for seven days (Vayikra 23:42)

(כ) ***Kol ha'ezrach b'Yisrael yeishvu basukkot*** – all natives among Israel shall live in sukkot (ibid)

(ל) ***L'ma'an yeidu doroteichem ki vasukkot hoshavti et Bnei Yisrael*** – So that your generations will be aware that I settled the Children of Israel in sukkot (ibid 23:43) (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֶשְׂרֵה גַמְלִים מֵאֲדֹנָיו - And the servant took ten camels of his master's camels (24:10)

Why was it necessary to state that the camels that Eliezer took belonged to his master? For sure he would not have taken anyone else's camels! Rashi quoting the Midrash Rabbah explains that the verse seeks to indicate that it was evident to all that they were Avraham's camels, for they were muzzled as they walked, so they should not graze in other people's fields and be guilty of robbery.

The Siftei Chachamim says that Avraham was even more careful than required by law, and did not allow the camels to graze even from the grass found at the very edges of the road, areas where the owners would generally surrender their rights to the public. Avraham wanted to be an inspiration to his descendants and went beyond the letter of the law. Mizrahi explains that although the camels would probably not have eaten anything forbidden, Avraham was still accustomed to keeping them muzzled because he did not wish to rely upon miracles.

וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַ לְשׁוֹחַ - Isaac went out to supplicate in the field (24:63)

Rashi explains that the word **לְשׁוּחַ** - *Lasuach* usually translated to speak, is used here in reference to prayer. When Isaac went out to the field, it was to daven. The Sefer Likutei Amarim wonders if Yitzchak's purpose in going to the field was to pray, why doesn't the Torah say **לְהִתְפַּלֵּל** - *lehitpalel* – the usual word for prayer? Why does it use the word **לְשׁוּחַ** - *Lasuach*, which usually means to converse? He explains that the mitzvot of righteous people are performed humbly. Isaac went out as though “to speak” to someone in the field. A casual observer would not have known that he was en route to pray to Hashem. (Source: Something To Say)

The Rabbis teach that Yitzchak instituted the Mincha prayer. The Gemara Berachot 26a says that “the prayers were instituted by the Forefathers. Avraham instituted Shacharit, Yitzchak, Mincha and Yaakov, Maariv.” The second letter of each of their names alludes to the prayer that they were responsible for instituting. The second letter in Avraham is “bet” – the first letter of *boker*- Hebrew for morning when we daven Shacharit. The second letter in the name Yitzchak is “tzaddi” –the first letter of *tzaharayim* – Hebrew for afternoon when we daven Mincha and the second letter of Yaakov is “ayin” –the first letter of the Hebrew word *erev* – Hebrew for evening when we daven Maariv. (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 3.54pm



Shabbat ends: 4.58pm