**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Lech Lecha – Vol. 12, Issue 3**

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**ויהי כאשר הקריב לבוא מצרימה ויאמר אל שרי אשתו הנה נא ידעתי כי אשה יפת מראה את (12:11)**

Due to a famine in the land of Canaan, Avrohom and Sorah decided to travel to Egypt. As they approached the border between the two countries, Avrohom became aware of Sorah’s beauty and began to fear that the Egyptians would want to marry her and would kill him in order to do so. Why did he suddenly become aware of her beauty at this time?

Rashi explains that due to their tremendous modesty, Avrohom had never looked at her and was unaware of her attractive appearance. At this time, something occurred which caused him to look at her for the first time, and he recognized her beauty. Why does the Torah emphasize the seemingly irrelevant geographical fact that this occurred as they drew close to Egypt, and as there are no coincidences in even the most minute details of events, why did Hashem cause this to occur at this time?

Although we are unable to relate to it, Avrohom was on such a high level in spirituality and modesty that he felt it appropriate to be married solely for the sake of Heaven and not to even look at his wife, a practice which he successfully upheld for decades. The Noda BiYehuda notes that this is even more remarkable in light of the teaching of the Gemora in Megillah (15a) that Sorah was one of the four most beautiful women in the history of the world, a reputation of which he was surely aware, and yet with tremendous self-control elected not to have any benefit from.

The Rambam writes (Hilchos Deios 6:1) that a person is naturally influenced by his surroundings. The Egyptians were a nation more immoral and depraved than any other, excelling in their passion for illicit relationships (Rashi Vayikra 18:3). Rav Moshe Wolfson explains that as Avrohom approached the Egyptian border – even before he crossed it – he was negatively influenced by the immorality which permeated the very air of Egypt, which caused him to fall from his great heights of personal modesty, and for the first time he glanced at his wife’s beauty. The recognition of the effect that one’s surroundings can have on even the greatest of men should serve as a lesson for us, who have much farther to fall, about the importance of dwelling and spending our leisure time in environments that are conducive to Torah values.

**אמרי נא אחתי את למען ייטב לי בעבורך וחיתה נפשי בגללך (12:13)**

There was once a man who fell into difficult financial straits. Unable to pay for even the most basic necessities, he had no choice but to begin accepting loans. Unfortunately, his situation didn’t improve and his debts continued to accrue. Recognizing his desire to pay off his debts and his frustration over lacking the means to do so, a friend offered to pay off the loans for him as a present.

The man was very appreciative of his friend’s generosity, but he felt uncomfortable accepting financial gifts of such magnitude. Though his friend encouraged him to reconsider, he remained obstinate in his position, justifying his decision with the verse in Mishlei (15:27) שונא מתנות יחיה – One who hates gifts will live, advice which is codified as law (Choshen Mishpat 249:5). With neither friend willing to budge, they agreed to present their “dispute” to a Rav for resolution.

After hearing the two sides, Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein ruled that the debtor was obligated to accept the gift. He supported his ruling by noting that as Avrohom and Sorah approached Egypt, Avrohom asked Sorah to pretend to be his sister so that the Egyptians would give him presents on account of her. Why was Avrohom, who later refused to accept even the smallest gift from the king of Sodom (14:23), so interested in receiving presents from the Egyptians?

After leaving Egypt to return to Canaan, the Torah relates (13:3) that Avrohom traveled on the same path which he had taken on his way down. Rashi explains that he stayed in the same inns in which he had lodged on his way to Egypt. As Avrohom had lacked the means to pay for his accommodations, he was forced to stay in lodging which extended him a line of credit. On his way home, he was careful to stop at each of these inns to pay the bills he had accumulated.

We can now understand that as Avrohom approached Egypt in a time of famine, he feared that on his return journey he would be no better off than before and would lack the means to pay off his creditors. As much as he was loathe to accept gifts, he was even more uncomfortable remaining a debtor to people who had helped him in his time of need. Out of desperation, he hatched a plan to claim that Sorah was his sister so that the Egyptians would shower him with gifts, allowing him to repay his debts. As מעשה אבות סימן לבנים – the actions of our forefathers guide us in our lives – we may derive from Avrohom that it is indeed appropriate for a person facing financial hardship to accept presents to pay off his accrued debts.

**ותאמר שרי אל אברם חמסי עליך אנכי נתתי שפחתי בחיקך ותרא כי הרתה ואקל בעיניה (16:5)**

After Avrohom and Sorah had lived together in the land of Israel for ten years and had not been able to successfully bear a child, Sorah suggested to Avrohom that perhaps he should attempt to have a child with her maidservant Hagar. Avrohom accepted Sorah's advice, and Hagar conceived a child, at which point she lost her respect for her master Sorah, claiming that Sorah wasn't as pious as she purported to be, as evidenced by the fact that she had been unable to have a child for so many years, while Hagar became pregnant immediately.

Sorah then approached Avrohom and complained about his decision to remain quiet in the face of Hagar's allegations instead of speaking up and setting the record straight. Although Sorah must certainly have been pained to hear her maidservant Hagar speak about her in such denigrating terms, it is difficult to understand why she demanded that Avrohom speak up and defend her instead of coming to her own defense by directly responding to Hagar's accusations.

Rav Meir Shapiro suggests that Sorah's reticence can be understood based on a fascinating episode involving Rabbeinu Tam, which is cited by the Taz (Orach Chaim 128:39). A Kohen was once pouring water over Rabbeinu Tam's hands. Observing this, Rabbeinu Tam's student challenged the permissibility of his conduct in light of the ruling of the Yerushalmi (Berachos 8:5) that it is forbidden to make use of a Kohen for mundane purposes, and one who does so is considered to be stealing and misusing something holy. Rabbeinu Tam attempted to justify his conduct, but his student refuted his logic, at which point he remained silent.

The Taz explains that it is permissible for a person to allow a Kohen to assist him if the Kohen desires to do so. In this case, the Kohen recognized that Rabbeinu Tam was a renowned Torah scholar and specifically wanted to serve him. Rabbeinu Tam was aware of this and therefore allowed the Kohen to do so. Nevertheless, he remained quiet when challenged by his student to justify his actions, as he was uncomfortable describing himself as a Torah scholar, so he elected not to explain the true legal rationale for his actions.

Similarly, Rav Meir Shapiro posits that although Hagar reasoned that Sorah's inability to conceive a child with Avrohom revealed a lack of righteousness on her part, Sorah knew that this wasn't the case. The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 45:4) teaches that the true reason that Sorah and the other Matriarchs were barren is that Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. However, just as Rabbeinu Tam did not want to refer to himself as a Torah scholar, so too Sorah did not want to seem arrogant by explaining to Hagar that her tremendous piety caused Hashem to yearn for her prayers, so she had no choice but to rely on Avrohom to do so on her behalf.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. To which book of Tanach did Malki-Tzedek contribute? (Bava Basra 14b)
2. When would one recite a blessing ending אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו במצות וחוקים של אברהם אבינו – thanking Hashem for sanctifying us with His mitzvos, and commanding us in the mitzvos and statutes of Avrohom Avinu? (Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 169 Seder Chalitzah 57)
3. In Parshas Lech Lecha (17:12), Hashem gives Avrohom the mitzvah of bris mila (circumcision). When somebody is making a bris, it is customary not to directly invite people, but merely to notify them, lest they be punished if they do not attend a seudas mitzvah (festive meal in honor of a mitzvah) to which they were invited. Why do we not have the custom to refrain from inviting people to a wedding for the same reason? (Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos 2:649)
4. Is the mitzvah of circumcision (17:12) a mitzvah which is performed once in one’s life, at the time of the cutting off of the foreskin, or is it a mitzvah which is continuously fulfilled every second of one’s life that he remains circumcised? (Mahara”ch Ohr Zarua 11, Beis HaLevi Vol. 2 47:4, Pri Yitzchok 2:30, Chavatzeles HaSharon, Ma’adanei Asher 5769)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Gemora** teaches that Dovid HaMelech wrote the book of Tehillim with assistance from 10 other people, one of whom was Malki-Tzedek. Rashi writes that Malki-Tzedek wrote chapter 110 of Tehillim.

2) Worried that the evil king of Sodom would take credit for making him rich, Avrohom refused to accept any gifts from him, emphasizing that he would not even take a string or shoelace (14:23). The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 43:9) teaches that in the merit of refusing to accept these two items, Avrohom’s descendants merited receiving two mitzvos: the mitzvah of tzitzis, which is performed with strings; and the mitzvos of chalitzah, which is performed with a shoe. Accordingly, the **Shulchan Aruch** rules that when the officiating Rabbi begins the chalitzah ceremony, he recites a blessing thanking Hashem for commanding us in the mitzvos and statutes of Avrohom Avinu, as it was in his merit that we received this mitzvah. Nevertheless, because this blessing is not mentioned in the Gemora, it should be recited without mentioning שם ומלכות – Hashem’s name and kingship.

3) **Rav Moshe Shternbuch** posits that the Gemora’s (Pesachim 113b) threat of punishment for not attending a seudas mitzvah only applies to somebody who refuses to attend because he feels that it is beneath his dignity and pride. However, if he is concerned about spending time there that could otherwise be utilized to learn Torah, he need not attend. Consequently, a bris, which is relatively short, should be attended, and it is therefore customary not to directly invite people, lest they be punished if they decline the invitation. A wedding, on the other hand, involves much more time, and because there are legitimate grounds not to participate, there is no issue with inviting people.

4) The **Mahara”ch Ohr Zarua** writes that the mitzvah of circumcision is not completed with the removal of the foreskin, but it is a mitzvah which continues every moment of one’s life that he is circumcised. As proof, he quotes the Gemora in Menachos (43b) which teaches that Dovid HaMelech was once in the bathhouse and grew concerned that he was lacking any mitzvos at that moment until he realized that his circumcision constituted a mitzvah he was presently performing. The **Ma’adanei Asher** notes that this proof is even stronger in light of the Gemora in Sotah (10b) which teaches that Dovid was born already circumcised. The **Beis HaLevi** explains that the mitzvah of bris mila actually of 2 different mitzvos: the act of circumcising the 8-day-old child which is derived from 17:12, and an additional mitzvah of being circumcised at every moment of one’s life which constitutes a continual covenant with Hashem which is derived from 17:13. The **Chavatzeles HaSharon** suggests that according to this opinion, one who forgot to recite a blessing over the mitzvah of bris mila at the time of the circumcision should be permitted to say it at when he realizes his mistake. However, he notes that the Tashbatz and Rav Yehuda Assad rule that after the circumcision has been completed, no blessing may be recited.

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