

## Being a Man of Faith

In this week's reading from Parashat Chayei Sarah (*Shemot / Genesis 23:1-25:18*) we learn, (i) Sarah Abraham's wife dies and is buried (23:1-3), (ii) Abraham bargains for a piece of land from the sons of Heth to bury his wife (23:4-20), (iii) Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac (24:1-4), (iv) Abraham's servant Eleazar meets Rebecca at the watering spring (24:11-21), (v) Abraham marries Keturah (25:1-6), and (vi) Abraham dies (25:7-8). In this week's portion, Abraham acted righteously before the people living in the Land of Israel, by being honest in purchasing a piece of land to bury his wife. We also read how Eleazar had great faith in the God of Abraham to help him in his task to find a wife for Isaac. Eleazar believed in the Lord God of Abraham to help him according to his prayer in *Bereshit / Genesis 24:43*, הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵין הַמַּיִם וְהִנֵּה, *"behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, Please let me drink a little water from your jar."*

Based upon the narrative in the Scriptures, the Lord prepared the minds and lives of Rebecca and her family so that Eleazar would know that he had found the woman the Lord has prepared for Isaac. Like Eleazar, the Lord has and is preparing the way for each of us to serve Him. This week's reading is a great example of being men of faith and faithfulness before the Lord. We are to remember God's promises, to fear Him, and be willing to take the path that He has set before us.

### ספר בראשית פרק כד *Bereshit / Genesis 24:12-15*

יב ויאמר | יהוה אלהי אדני אבי  
רַחֵם הַקְּרָה-נָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם וְעֲשֵׂה-חֶסֶד  
עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם: יג הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי נֹצֵב  
עַל-עֵין הַמַּיִם וּבָנוֹת אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוֹת  
לְשָׂאב מַיִם: יד וְהִנֵּה הַנְּעֹרָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר  
אֵלַי הִטִּי-נָא כַדָּהּ וְאַשְׁתָּה וְאַמְרָה  
שְׂתָה וְגַם-גַּמְלִיךָ אֲשַׁקָּה אֶתָּה הַכַּחֲתָ  
לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וּבָה אֲדַע כִּי-עָשִׂיתָ  
חֶסֶד עִם-אֲדֹנָי: טו וַיְהִי-הוּא טָרַם  
כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר וְהִנֵּה רַבְקָה יֹצֵאת אֲשֶׁר  
יָלְדָה לְבְתוּאֵל בֶּן-מִלְכָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ נָחוֹר  
אָחִי אַבְרָהָם וְכַדָּה עַל-שִׁכְמָה:

24:12 He said, 'O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham.  
24:13 'Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water; 24:14 now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also' may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master.' 24:15 Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor, came out with her jar on her shoulder. (NASB)

According to *Tehillim / Psalms 143:1*, David says "A Psalm of David. Hear my prayer, O LORD, Give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness!" Similar to David's words describing God's faithfulness to Himself and to His people, according to the Scriptures, the Lord does answer our prayers. In Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 60, Part 1, the rabbis speak of the faith and faithfulness of

both Abraham and Eleazar (מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ס סימן א). The midrash states the following:

***Midrash Rabbah Bereshit, Parashat 60, Part 1***

*And He said, O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray, good speed this day, etc (Bereshit / Genesis 24:12). It is written, Who is among you that fears the Lord, that hears the voice of his servant (Isaiah 50:10)? Who is among you that fears the Lord refers to Abraham; that hears the voice of his servant, etc., he listened to the voice of the Holy One blessed be He, to His servant. Who walked in darkness, from Mesopotamia and its environs; and has no light. Who then gave him light? God illumined his path wherever he went. Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, thus it is written, And his [Abraham's] heart faithful before You (Nehemiah 9:8). Another interpretation, Who is among you that fears the Lord, alludes to Eleazar; who heard the voice of his servant, for he was Abraham's servant. Who walked in darkness when he went to fetch Rebekah. And has no light, who then gave him light? The Holy One blessed be He, illumined his path with meteors and lightnings. Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay on his God, thus it is written, and he said, O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, send me, I pray, good speed this day.*

**מדרש רבה בראשית פרשה ס סימן א**

א ויאמר ה' אלהי אברהם הקרה נא לפני היום וגו' (ישעיה נ) מי בכם ירא ה' שומע בקול עבדו אמר מי בכם ירא ה' זה אברהם, שומע בקול עבדו וגו' אשר שמע הקב"ה בקולו של עבדו, אשר הלך חשכים, שבא מאספמיא ומחברותיה ולא היה יודע היכן, כאדם שהוא שרוי בחושך, ואין נוגה לו, ומי היה מאיר לו הקב"ה היה מאיר לו בכל מקום שהיה הולך, יבטח בשם ה' וישען באלהיו, ומצאת את לבבו נאמן לפניך, ד"א מי בכם ירא ה' זה אליעזר, שומע בקול עבדו, בקול אברהם שהיה עבד להקב"ה שנא' (בראשית כו) בעבור אברהם עבדי, אשר הלך חשכים, בשעה שהלך להביא את רבקה ואין נוגה לו, ומי היה מאיר לו הקב"ה היה מאיר לו בזיקים ובברקים, יבטח בשם ה' וישען באלהיו, ויאמר ה' אלהי אדוני אברהם הקרה נא לפני היום.

According to Midrash Rabbah, for prayer to be answered, one must fear the Lord. The Lord listens to those who fear Him. The midrash states that the one who feared the Lord is Abraham. They say that Abraham walked in darkness in Mesopotamia (while with his pagan Chaldean family) and the Lord gave him light, the Lord illumined his path wherever he went by instructing him in truth, righteousness, and justice. The rabbis also say that the Lord listened to the voice of Abraham's servant, Eleazar, for the simple fact that he was Abraham's servant. The midrash states that Eleazar walked in darkness when

he went to fetch Rebecca, meaning that he traveled back to the land of Mesopotamia, a land of idol worship and it is the Lord who gave Eleazar light to see in the darkness. Eleazar trusted in the name of the Lord remaining in his faith as a servant of Abraham. The point of the midrash is that Eleazar having heard Abraham speak of the Lord and His faithfulness, he too had faith and developed a fear of the Lord. Being faithful to the Lord, Eleazar sought the Lord for help in his time of need. The Lord heard his prayer and answered him.

As we continue in the narrative of this week's portion, we again see the faithfulness of Abraham in *Bereshit / Genesis 24:63*, when Rebecca saw Isaac, according to the Aramaic Targum we read the following:

***Targum Pseudo Jonathan, Bereshit / Genesis 24:63***

*And Izhak was coming from the school of the Rabba Shem, by the way of the fountain where had been revealed to him the Living and Eternal One, who seeth, and is not seen; and he resided in the land of the south. [JERUSALEM. And Izhak was coming from the school of the Rabba Shem, at the fountain where had been revealed to him the Shekinah of the Lord; and he dwelt in the land of the south.} And Izhak went forth to pray upon the face of the field at the time of evening; and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were approaching.*

According to the Aramaic Targum, the rabbis say that Isaac had returned from the "school of Rabba Shem" and was praying in the field when he saw Rebecca approaching. The Jewish encyclopedia states, "*Shem is unanimously declared by the Rabbis to have been the youngest son of Noah (comp. Japheth in Rabbinical Literature), yet he is always named first, being the most important of the three brothers. Indeed, he was born circumcised; he was the ancestor of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he was priest and prophet; and he was one of the eight righteous who are mentioned twice in Gen. xi. 10 and who were allotted a portion both in this world and in the world to come (Sanh. 69b; Tan., Yelammedenu, Noah; Midr. ha-Gadol on Gen. ix. 18, xi. 10, ed. Schechter, cols. 142, 186). Shem is styled "the great one" ("Shem rabba"; Sanh. 108b). According to Gen. R. xxx. 6, it was Shem who offered the sacrifices on the altar after Noah came out of the ark (comp. Gen. viii. 20)*" What is interesting about the Aramaic Targum and the rabbinic understanding on Abraham and Isaac in the narrative is in the way in which the Targum expands upon Isaac praying in the field as Rebecca approaches. According to Judaism, the Yeshiva or Beit Midrash has been the institution in which the Torah has been formally transmitted from teacher to student, from generation to generation. It is believed this transmission of Torah or religious studies has occurred from time immemorial, and we can see this idea has an ancient basis by the rabbis integrating this into the narrative of the Aramaic translation on Isaac coming from the school of Rabba Shem. In the Aramaic Targum we find an ancient understanding on the importance of studying God's word, the historical and literary evidence for importance of Torah study is provided right here out of the Targum translation. In the rabbinic literature, the most legendary place of study was the school that was headed by Shem, Noah's third son

(*Bereshit / Genesis 6:10*) and was then passed on to Shem's grandson (*Bereshit / Genesis 10:21-24*). The rabbis ask the question of what happened to Isaac following the Akedah (עֲקִידָת) and their answer is that he was studying at the Yeshiva of Shem. Abraham had sent Isaac to study God's word or more specifically, God's commands. This idea may be a little anachronistic since Isaac could not have possibly been studying the Torah since it had not been given yet, however, there is a Rabbinic tradition that the laws (Dinim) originated in the Garden of Eden (*Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 56b*) and therefore were extant long before the Torah was given at Sinai.

The point of these various things in the rabbinic literature, the Aramaic Targum, the midrash, and this weeks reading from the Torah, is that of being faithful to the Lord. Within the Aramaic translation we find the concept that Abraham, being faithful to God and to his family, was teaching his son Isaac about God's word. The rabbis say he was returning from the school of Rabba Shem. We know that as parents, that we are obligated to educate our children in God's word as we are told according to *Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4-7*.

***Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4-7***

*6:4 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 6:5 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6:6 'These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (NASB)*

According to the Aramaic translation, Abraham did this very thing to Isaac. Midrash Rabbah states *"Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God, thus it is written, And his [Abraham's] heart faithful before You."* Abraham remained faithful to God because he taught his children and the surrounding peoples about the One True God. Eleazar believed in the Lord God of Abraham evidenced by his prayer when he said, הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵין הַמַּיִם וְהִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הַיֹּצֵאת לְשֶׁאֵב וְאֶמְרָתִי אֵלֶיהָ הַשְּׁקִינִי-נָא מְעַט-מַיִם מִכַּדָּךְ *"behold, I am standing by the spring, and may it be that the maiden who comes out to draw, and to whom I say, Please let me drink a little water from your jar"* (*Bereshit / Genesis 24:43*). Because of their faithfulness, the Lord heard their prayers and answered their prayers. From the study thus far, the question before us is, *"does our faithfulness today result in the Lord hearing and answering our prayers?"* We have all heard it said that we just need to pray in the name of Jesus and God will hear our prayer without mention of living a righteous life. Is living righteously implicitly understood? Would the Lord God hear the prayer of an unrighteous person if he is praying in the name of Jesus outside of the prayer of forgiveness? (see *Tehillim / Psalms 66:18*) Remember, both faith and faithfulness go hand in hand. Faith is what we have on the inside, faithfulness is what we do as a result of our faith in the Lord. A simple search in the Scriptures produces many results on those who claimed to have faith but their actions do not demonstrate the faith that they have within. According to the Scriptures, Abraham is described as

having received many gifts from God, he became the father of many nations, he was the friend of God, he had his prayers answered, etc and this was by reason that he was faithful to the word of the Lord. The Jewish understanding of Abraham, from our study here and elsewhere, the Lord God justifying Abraham is because of his personal faithfulness. The Apostle Paul said according to *Romans 4* that justification of sinners is based upon Christ crucified. There is no contradiction here since those who “*remain*” or “*abide*” in Christ will be walking in His ways by living according to His Torah, in truth, justice, righteousness, love, mercy, and peace, the very products of faith in a life of faithfulness. We cannot claim to be in the Messiah Yeshua and our lives not exhibit these essential characteristics of faithfulness. In this week’s Torah portion, Parashat Chai Sarah, we are given a great example from two men of faith, from Abraham who taught everyone unwavering and relentlessly about the One True God, and of Eleazar, who trusted in the Lord to make his path straight to find a wife for Isaac. If we continue in God’s word daily, live in faithfulness before Him, walk with humble hearts, and remain in the Messiah Yeshua, according to the Scriptures, He will surely hear and answer our prayers.

Thinking on these things, is it possible to exclude any part from this list above and expect the Lord to hear us? The Lord is calling us to holiness and righteousness in His Son Yeshua. He has enabled us to enter into a covenant with Him in and through His Son. Being in the covenant, the Lord sets us free from the bondage of habitual sin and enables us to live in victory on a daily basis. The point is that we need to recognize our inability to overcome habitual sin and our need to rely upon the power of God’s Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The Apostle Paul said in *Romans 7:25* “*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.*” It is the Lord God Almighty by His Holy Spirit that enables us to carry out what is right and true and just. This is an automatic process, walking in this way requires one’s personal intention to do so and seeking the Lord God in Heaven to help. Like we read in the Torah portion this week, Abraham and Eleazar both trusted the Lord to help in their time of need. Today, we too need to trust in the Lord to help us in our time of need.

