

פרשת
חיי שרה
Parashat Chayei Sarah

*Bereshit / Genesis 23:1-25:18, 1 Kings 1:1-31
Matthew 2:1-23*

**Hebrew Letter Nun (נ), and the Lord Blessing the Way
of the Faithful**

When looking at the letter Nun (נ) in Hebrew, at the opening and middle positions, we used the standard letter nun, and at the end of a word, we used the final form (ן). The bent over shape lends to the rabbinic interpretation on the word “*faithful*” beginning and ending with the nun (נאמן). The *Talmud Bavli Shabbat 104a* characterizes the common form of the nun as “*bent over and faithful*” saying the following:

Talmud Bavli Shabbat 104a

הוּ זֶה שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא זֶה טִי כֹל וְאִם אֵתָּה
עוֹשֶׂה כֵּן הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא זֶן אוֹתְךָ וְחֵן אוֹתְךָ וּמְטִיב לְךָ
וְנוֹתֵן לְךָ יְרוּשָׁה וְקוֹשֶׁר לְךָ כְּתָר לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא מִמֶּנּוּ פְתוּחָה
מִמֶּנּוּ סְתוּמָה מֵאִמֵּר פְתוּחָה מֵאִמֵּר סְתוּמָה נֹון כְּפוּפָה נֹון פְּשׁוּר־
טָה נֹאמֵן כְּפוּף נֹאמֵן פְּשׁוּט

*The children continued to interpret the letters. Heh vav:
That is the principal name of the Holy One, Blessed be*

He. Zayin het, tet yod, kaf lamed: And if you do so, the Holy One, Blessed be He, feeds [zan] you, and shows you favor [han], and bestows goodness [meitiv] upon you, and gives you an inheritance [yerusha], and ties a crown [keter] for you in the World to Come [la'olam haba]. The open mem and closed mem indicate that the Torah contains an open statement, understood by all, and an esoteric statement. The bent nun and the straight nun at the end of a word refer to a faithful person who is bent [ne'eman kafuf] and is modest now, who will ultimately become a well-known faithful person [ne'eman pashut].

The long, straight line of the final form represents “*straight and unboundedly faithful.*” This characterization of the letter nun (נ) as being bent over and faithful, is interestingly also found as the middle letter for the Hebrew word poor (עני) and humble (צנוע). This is interpreted as when one takes a vow, he is to be faithful, lowly, and of a humble state of mind. Figuratively speaking, bent over from the weight of life’s challenges, one must not just bend down and search deep within to find the strength to carry on, but also be humble and faithful to seek the Lord’s help to do so. In this week’s Torah portion, Parashat Chayei Sarah, the servant of Abraham was humble and faithful in his task to find a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac. The characteristic of the letter nun coupled with its connection to the words for faithful, poor, and humble, allude to a humble and faithful servant who is transformed by his relationship with God. When one has faith and lives by that faith he/she is able to straighten out (ן) and again stand tall to overcome anything. This is how we understand the Lord blesses the way of the faithful servant. This is the kind of man the servant of Abraham was who went outside of the Land of Canaan to find a wife for Isaac. It is in this way both faith and obedience are connected.

In *Bereshit / Genesis 24*, we read the servant of Abraham making a vow concerning the matter of going to get a wife for Isaac. *Bereshit / Genesis 24:12* states, *24:12 He said, ‘O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham.* (NASB, יב ויאמר | יהוה אלהי אדני אברהם

(הַקְרָה-נָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם וְעֲשֵׂה-הֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם: When the servant said, וַיֹּאמֶר | יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם הַקְרָה-נָא, he was saying “*God please make it happen*” Eliezer was certain by faith that the Lord God would send His angel ahead to make the mission a success. He also added the prayer expressing the hope that he would be found worthy to be the instrument through which Abraham’s prayer would be fulfilled.

Bereshit / Genesis 24:9-16

24:9 So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. 24:10 Then the servant took ten camels from the camels of his master, and set out with a variety of good things of his master’s in his hand; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. 24:11 He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. 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. 24:16 The girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her; and she went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. (NASB)

ט וַיִּשָּׂם הָעֶבֶד אֶת-יָדוֹ תַּחַת יָרֵךְ אַבְרָהָם אֲדֹנָיו וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ
עַל-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה: [שלישי] י וַיִּקַּח הָעֶבֶד עֲשָׂרָה גַמְלִים מִגָּר־

מְלִי אֲדֹנָיו וַיִּלֶּךְ וְכָל-טוֹב אֲדֹנָיו בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-אָרַם
בְּהָרִים אֶל-עֵיר נְחוּר: יֵא וַיִּבְרַךְ הַגְּמָלִים מִחוּץ לְעֵיר
אֶל-בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם לְעֵת עָרֵב לְעֵת צֹאת הַשָּׁאֲבֹת: יב וַיֹּאמֶר |
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנָי אֲבָרְכֶם הַקְּרָה-נָא לְפָנַי הַיּוֹם וְעֲשֵׂה-חֶסֶד
עִם אֲדֹנָי אֲבָרְכֶם: יג הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל-עֵין הַמַּיִם וּבָנוֹת
אֲנֹשִׁי הָעֵיר יֵצְאֹת לְשָׂאֵב מַיִם: יד וְהָיָה הַנֹּצֵעַ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר
אֵלָיָה הֵטִי-נָא כַדָּף וְאִשְׁתָּה וְאִמְרָה לְשִׁתָּה וְגַם-גְּמָלֶיךָ אִשְׁקָה
אֹתָהּ הַכַּחֲתָ לְעַבְדְּךָ לְיִצְחָק וּבָה אֲדַע כִּי-עָשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם-
אֲדֹנָי: טו וַיְהִי-הוּא טָרַם כָּלָה לְדַבֵּר וְהָיָה רַבָּקָה יֵצְאֹת
אֲשֶׁר יִלְדָה לְבַתוֹאֵל בֶּן-מִלְכָּה אִשְׁתֵּי נְחוּר אַחֵי אֲבָרְכָהּ
וְכַדָּה עַל-נְשָׁמָה: טז וְהַנֹּצֵעַ טָבַת מִרְאָה מְאֹד בְּתוֹלָה
וְאִישׁ לֹא יִדְעָה וַתִּרְדַּד הָעֵינָה וַתְּמַלֵּא כַדָּה וַתַּעַל:

According to Parashat Vayera, the Lord God said to Abraham in *Bereshit / Genesis 19*, “*For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the LORD may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.*” Abraham entrusted the responsibility of finding a wife for Isaac to his oldest and most trusted servant. In the Story of how Isaac obtained his wife, we read of the greatness of Abraham’s servants. The devotion of this servant to Abraham and to God is one of the highlights of *Bereshit / Genesis 24*. Abraham’s servant demonstrated piety, humbleness, a prayer life, and practical wisdom that sets a very high standard for each of us.

The commentary *Tur HaAroch on Bereshit / Genesis 24:13 Part 1* states the following:

Tur HaAroch, Bereshit / Genesis 24:13 Part 1

הנה אנכי נצב על עין המים, “*here I am standing at the well of water, etc.*” He meant that at this site he could conduct the kind of experiment which should show him if his mission would be successful as he could examine any prospective girl regarding her personal virtues, such as her attitude to unknown strangers making un-called for requests. His reasoning was that if a girl be-

haves in a modest manner at home this was a reflection on her mother, whereas if she behaved modestly away from home she displayed her own virtue thereby, and not fear of being reprimanded by her mother.

The commentary states that Abraham's servant conducted an experiment which would show him whether his mission was successful. His faith in God was significant believing in his prayer the Lord would answer him. The way he tested this girl was to understand whether she was virtuous from within. Rebecca responded exactly how Abraham's servant requested, she gave him a drink of water, and then watered all of the camels. The example that we are given is of faith in God as the One who guides His people. Abraham instructed his servant and he was faithful that the Lord would lead him to find the girl the God had prepared for Isaac. We also see how the Lord God guides His children by way of His angel (*Bereshit / Genesis 24:7*). He prepares the way for us to walk in His will and to be able to sense His leading us in our lives. As a result, we live our lives by faith just as Abraham did knowing that the Lord God is our guide.

These things reveal to us the significance of studying the Torah. The significance of Torah for both Yeshua and Paul emanates from Judaism. The Jewish faith views the giving of the Torah as a supernatural event having the highest importance because it teaches us about faith and faithfulness. In the biblical account, the Lord God Almighty descended from heaven to the mountain of Sinai in order to reveal His will to Israel. Christianity on the other hand, views the Law of God through the window of ecclesiastical history. This perspective to a certain extent has influenced Christianity's struggle to define itself apart from its Jewish roots. Note how in Parashat Chayei Sarah, Abraham was defining himself and his son from the peoples of the land of Canaan. What Abraham did sending his servant and making him swear to not take a woman from the Canaanites was not the same as was what we read in church history separating from Judaism. Abraham sent his servant to his own people to find a wife in order to keep his son faithful to God and not fall away into the paganism of the surrounding peoples. One of the founding themes that come out of the Torah is the principle of separating ourselves as a holy people before

God. Studying the history of the church, at the forefront of the separation of Christianity from its Jewish roots was Marcion (85-159 AD), he denied the validity of the Hebrew Bible for faith and practice. The early Christians condemned Marcion but his teachings made their way into the minds of God's people through a pervasive theology. As a result, the Jewish understanding of the Torah has been largely ignored throughout Church history. The Jewish view of the Torah however was the foundation of Yeshua and Paul's teachings. Yeshua taught *"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17) Three words here in this scripture verse, "Law," "Abolish," and "Fulfill," raise issues that are fundamental to New Testament theology. If Yeshua fulfilled the Law, is it then abolished? Some have taught that Yeshua offered liberty from the yoke of the law because all has been fulfilled in his person. This interpretive approach tends to separate Christians from their biblical heritage, and it finds strong support from certain sectors of the church. Both the layperson and clergy are untutored in the roots of Christian faith and do not recognize that Marcion and his disciples taught a similar approach to the law and the prophets. Modern theologies today grasp hold of and hold onto a heretical doctrine concerning the Torah saying it has passed away in the Messiah Yeshua.

Something of utmost importance is how God Himself describes Moshe as His *"faithful servant"* (Bamidbar / Numbers 12:7 *'Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; NASB* :הוא לֹא-כֵן עֲבָדִי מֹשֶׁה בְּכָל-בֵּיתִי נְאֻמָּן הוּא: ז) and the Torah testifies that Moshe was a humble man, *"the humblest man on the face of the earth."* (Bamidbar / Numbers 12:3 *Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth. NASB* :ג וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו [עָנָיו] מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה: These Scriptures reveal the connection between faithfulness, humility, and leadership. Being humble does not mean that we allow everyone to walk all over us such that one is a weak and an ineffectual leader. It means that one is humble before God, not proud, and is a state of mind that one should have that makes for a great leader.

Concerning the letter nun (נ), the Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 98b states the following:

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 98b

מה שמו דבי רבי שילא אמרי שילה שמו שנאמר (ברא-
 שית מט, י) עד כי יבא שילה דבי רבי ינאי אמרי ינון שמו
 שנאמר (תהלים עב, יז) יהי שמו לעולם לפני שמש ינון
 שמו דבי רבי חנינה אמר חנינה שמו שנאמר (ירמיהו טז,
 יג) אשר לא אתן לכם חנינה ויש אומרים מנחם בן חזקיה
 שמו שנאמר (איכה א, טז) כי רחק ממני מנחם משיב
 נפשי ורבנן אמרי חיוורא דבי רבי שמו שנאמר (ישעיהו
 נג, ד) אכן חליינו הוא נשא ומכאובינו סבלם ואנחנו
 חשבנוהו נגוע מוכה אלהים ומעונה

Apropos the Messiah, the Gemara asks: What is his name? The school of Rabbi Sheila says: Shiloh is his name, as it is stated: “Until when Shiloh shall come” (Genesis 49:10). The school of Rabbi Yannai says: Yinnon is his name, as it is stated: “May his name endure forever; may his name continue [yinnon] as long as the sun; and may men bless themselves by him” (Psalms 72:17). The school of Rabbi Hanina says: Hanina is his name, as it is stated: “For I will show you no favor [hanina]” (Jeremiah 16:13). And some say that Menahem ben Hizkiyya is his name, as it is stated: “Because the comforter [menahem] that should relieve my soul is far from me” (Lamentations 1:16). And the Rabbis say: The leper of the house of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi is his name, as it is stated: “Indeed our illnesses he did bear and our pains he endured; yet we did esteem him injured, stricken by God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4).

The rabbis say the Messiah's name is Yinnon (יִנוֹן). Looking up the translation for this name, it is a male name but a meaning is not given. The name of the Messiah in this sense may be related to the letter nun (נ) as we described earlier as it is related to faithfulness and humility. The Messiah, like Moshe, will combine humility and faith to become

the greatest leader of all, leading us in the way of the Lord in God's Torah of righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. This is alluded to by the name given (Yinnum, יננ) and the letter nun, and the Talmud's usage of this name to describe the Messiah. In the mind of Yeshua, the Masoretic Text taught God's love for all people and provides a template for practical living in our daily lives. In Yeshua's statement from *Matthew 5:17*, He elevates the Torah by directing the listeners to understand the purpose behind the text, which leads us to seeking God and His help to overcome sin (right living). The Hebrew text and the Hebraic background clarifies the deeper meaning, just as we see in the rabbinic interpretations of the letter nun (נ), its principles of humility, lowliness, and faith that are connected to the Messiah and God's Word. If a person misuses the Torah by changing its intended meaning, one may miss the divine revelation that was given at the mountain of Sinai. Take for example those theologies (dispensationalism) that have the underlying principle that man earned his salvation in the OT, and now we are under grace in the NT. This misunderstanding causes one to miss the fact that God's grace was present from the beginning with Adam and Eve. The theological rhetoric within Christianity during its struggle to define itself apart from Judaism has led to the anti-Judaism teachings of Marcion. When one takes the proper view of the Torah, one begins to understand that one is able to obey God's will and therefore fulfill Torah. This is what Paul was saying in *Romans 3:30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. 3:31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law. (NASB)* Paul's understanding is that these three words "law," "abolish," "fulfill" had a different meaning in Hebraic thought than what we find today in the Modern English Translations. The root word for Torah means "teach" or "instruction" (to shoot an arrow in one direction). This provides us with the illustration as if the words of God were shot forth, having force, power, and direction for living life. The Torah is the divine aim for all peoples who love God. The Torah is God's will for His people and its meaning goes beyond the ink or words that are written upon the scroll. People however interpret the divine revelation of God in different ways. The correct interpretation breaths life into the words of God that were divinely spoken. The in-

correct interpretation however brings death as the apostle Paul wrote in *Romans 6-7* on the letter of the law and death as opposed to the spirit of the law and life. When studying God's word and applying God's word to our lives, the ultimate outcome is awe and reverence of God and His ways. The fear of God is foundational to our faith and learning Torah is what leads us to obedience as a sacred undertaking. Yeshua came to empower us to live according to the Spirit, and doing so by the power of God in our lives to overcome sin (which is another way of saying we obey God's Torah). By walking in the Spirit, we fulfill God's word in our lives (we live it), this gives us the proper understanding of the text which leads then to a lifestyle of holiness dedicated to God with His help. This is how Abraham's servant viewed the God of Abraham in helping him with his task to find a wife for Isaac. His faith in God was significant believing in his prayer and that the Lord would answer him. Abraham instructed his servant and he was faithful that the Lord would lead him to find the girl the God had prepared for Isaac. In this week's Torah portion we can see how the Lord God guides His children by faith. The Lord God Almighty prepares the way for us to walk in His will and we are supposed to be sensitive enough in the spirit to sense His leading us in our lives. These things come by studying God's word, being humble, lowly, and faithful, drawing near in prayer, and walking in God's ways. As a result, we live our lives by faith just as Abraham did knowing that the Lord God is our guide, our help, and the One who loves us!