Chayai Sarah 2017

1.

Can we trust others?

“And Avraham said to the senior servant of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, ‘Put your hand under my thigh and I will make you swear by Hashem, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell.” (24, 2-3)

"ויאמר אברהם אל עבדו זקן ביתו המשל בכל אשר לו שים נא ידך תחת ירכי. ואשביעך ביקוק אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ אשר לא תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי יושב בקרבו."

The Ohel Moshe (page 479) quotes Rav Shlomo Shawadran who points out that Eliezer was a faithful servant. The Gemara in Yuma (28b) says that Eliezer, Avraham’s servant, was an elder and sat in Yeshiva, as it is stated “And Avraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who ruled over all he had” (Berashis 24, 2). Rabbi Elazar said the pasuk means that he had mastery over the Torah of his master, having gained proficiency in all of the Torah of Avraham. That is the meaning of the pasuk “he is Damascus Eliezer” (Berashis 15, 2). Rabbi Elazar said the word Dammesek is a contraction of he who draws (דולה) and gives drink (משקה) to others from his master’s Torah. (אליעזר עבד אברהם זקן ויושב בישיבה היה שנאמר "ויאמר אברהם אל עבדו זקן ביתו המשל בכל אשר לו" אמר רבי אלעזר שמושל בתורת רבו. "הוא דמשק אליעזר" אמר רבי אלעזר שדולה ומשקה מתורתו של רבו לאחרים.)

Rashi (15, 2) explains that **Avraham entrusted Eliezer with all of his money. Why then did Avraham make Eliezer swear when he sent Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak? Why wasn’t he trusted for this task?** Rav Yisrael Salanter once visited a village. They asked him to perform shechita for them. He declined. He then asked them for a loan. They refused because they didn’t recognize him. Rav Salanter responded by saying that is precisely the point. **Why are you willing to rely on me for spiritual pursuits unlike physical pursuits?** How do you know I can properly slaughter animals? Did you test me? The Brisker Rav was very careful with his mitzvah performance. He explained that someone wouldn’t go in the middle of the market place flaunting a million dollars. One will guard this money carefully and constantly check his pockets because it is so valuable. The same applies to mitzvos. Every mitzvah is worth more than a million dollars. This is why the Brisker Rav was so careful with his mitzvah performance. **Avraham made Eliezer the ruler over all physical matters pertaining to the house. However, the same did not apply to spiritual matters. Finding a shidduch for Yitzchak was no light matter. The entire future of the Jewish people depended on this. For this important task Avraham didn’t trust Eliezer and thus made him make an oath.**

The lesson is regarding spiritual matters, we shouldn’t be so quick to rely on others. **If we wouldn’t give someone a loan for fifty dollars, then we surely shouldn’t rely on them for spiritual matters.** Just because someone has a small beard, it doesn’t mean that he can be relied upon for halachic matters. There are murderers that have beards. Disregard that aspect.

2.

Recognizing Hashem

“Sarah’s lifetime—the span of Sarah’s life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years.” (23, 1)

".ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה ועשרים שנה ושבע שנים שני חיי שרה"

The Kli Yakar points out that by Avraham the pasuk says (25, 7) “This was the total span of Avraham’s life one hundred and seventy-five years.” ("ואלה ימי שני חיי אברהם אשר חי מאת שנה ושבעים שנה וחמש שנים.") Why does pasuk say אשר חי a second time? The pasuk in Shmuel (beis 23, 20) says “Benaiah son of Jehoiada, from Kabtzeel, was a brave soldier who performed great deeds. He killed the two [sons] of Ariel of Moab. Once, on a snowy day, he went down into a pit and killed a lion.” ("ובניהו בן יהוידע בן איש חי חיל רב פעלים מקבצאל הוא הכה את שני אראל מואב והוא ירד והכה את האריה הארי בתוך הבאר ביום השלג.") The Gemara in Nedarim (32a) quotes Rabbi Ami bar Abba who says Avraham recognized his Creator at the age of three years, as it is stated “because (עקב) Avraham hearkened to My voice” (Berashis 26, 5). The numerical value of the letters of the word עקב is 172, indicating that he observed the halacha for this many years. If Avraham lived until 175 then his first recognition of the Creator must have been at the age of three. (א"ר אמי בר אבא בן ג' שנים הכיר אברהם את בוראו שנאמר "עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי" חושבניה מאה ושבעין ותרין.) Rambam (hilchos avoda zara 1, 3) holds that Avraham was forty when he recognized Hashem. Rived however says that he was three. Kesef Mishna compromises and says that he was three when he began to recognize Hashem. But, he only fully finished recognizing Hashem when he turned forty. **Avraham knew Hashem his entire life unlike Yishmael who only knew Hashem towards the end of his life when he repented. This is why specifically the pasuk says another time אשר חי by Avraham.**

When the pasuk states one hundred years it says year in the singular tense. However when the pasuk states seven years it says years in the plural tense. Why the difference? The full completeness of pious people is the time before they die. The Gemara in Shabbos (152a) relates that it was taught in a berisa that Rabbi Yishmael son of Rabbi Yosei says as Torah scholars grow older wisdom is increased in them as the pasuk states “with aged men is wisdom and length of days brings understanding.” (Iyov 12, 12) And as ignoramuses grow older foolishness is increased in them as the pasuk states “he removes the speech of men of trust and takes away the understanding of the aged” (Iyov 12, 20). (תניא רבי ישמעאל ברבי יוסי אומר תלמידי חכמים כל זמן שמזקינין חכמה נתוספת בהם שנאמר בישישים חכמה ואורך ימים תבונה ועמי הארץ כל זמן שמזקינין טפשות נתוספת בהן שנאמר מסיר שפה לנאמנים וטעם זקנים יקח) Furthermore, as they get older they get closer to the next world. Thus, their earlier years are all considered one year in comparison to their later years because in their later years they acquire much more completeness.

Another reason is that later years are more painful. The pasuk in Koheles (12, 1) says “so appreciate your vigor in the days of your youth, before those days of sorrow come and those years arrive of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’” During the later years it is harder to move about. People also tend to go through a more difficult time medically. Thus, since the earlier days feel so fast because they fly by they are referred to as one day unlike the later years which feel much longer.

3.

Mincha

“And Yitzchak went out walking in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching.” (24, 63)

"ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב וישא עיניו וירא והנה גמלים באים."

Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonason ben Uziel explain that the word לשוח means to daven. In fact, the Gemara in Berachos (26b) relates that **Yitzchak established mincha** (the afternoon prayer) as the pasuk states “And Yitzchak went out to converse (לשוח) in the field toward evening.” (Berashis 24, 63) The word converse means prayer as the pasuk states “a prayer of the afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint (שיחו) before Hashem.” (Tehilim 102, 1) (יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה שנאמר "ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה לפנות ערב" ואין שיחה אלא תפלה שנאמר "תפלה לעני כי יעטף ולפני ה׳ ישפך שיחו.")

The Gemara in Berachos (6b) quotes Rav Huna who says one must always be careful with regard to the afternoon prayer because Eliyahu’s was only answered in the mincha prayer as the pasuk states “and it was at the time of the afternoon offering that Eliyahu the prophet came near and he said Hashem, God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, let it be known on this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, Hashem, answer me, that this people will know that You, Hashem, are God.” (Malachim alef 18, 36–37) Since Eliyahu was answered in the mincha prayer, it has particular significance. (ואמר רבי חלבו אמר רב הונא לעולם יהא אדם זהיר בתפלת המנחה שהרי אליהו לא נענה אלא בתפלת המנחה שנאמר "ויהי בעלות המנחה ויגש אליהו הנביא ויאמר וגו׳ ענני ה׳ ענני.")

Even though Avraham established shacharis and Yaakov established maariv as the Gemara in Berachos (26b) states, nevertheless they weren’t immediately answered unlike Yitzchak who was answered immediately. Yitzchak probably davened for a good shidduch (spouse to be). The pasuk says that he lifted his eyes and saw the camels coming with his shidduch. We see from this that one gets answered at mincha more than other times.

What is the reason for this? Why is mincha so important? At night Hashem acts with strict judgment (מידת הדין). Hashem also acts this way shacharis time because it is close to the night. Mincha differs in this regard. (According to this answer musaf has the same power as mincha.) Another reason is as follows. The Tor (232) says that we allocate time to daven shacharis before we are involved with our daily activities. Maariv is also relatively easy to daven in that it is after work hours. However, **mincha is smack in the middle of the day when we are in the middle of working. It is thus hard to allocate time to daven. It is even harder to divert our minds from the rest of the day and focus on mincha. One who does this will receive a lot of reward.** (תפלת השחר זמנה ידוע בבקר בקומו ממטתו יתפלל מיד קודם שיהא טרוד בעסקיו, וכן של ערב בלילה זמנה ידוע בבואו לביתו והוא פנוי מעסקיו, אבל של מנחה שהיא באמצע היום בעוד שהוא טרוד בעסקיו צריך לשום אותה אל לבו ולפנות מכל עסקיו ולהתפלל אותה, ואם עשה כן שכרו הרבה מאד.)

Since we are discussing the importance of mincha, let’s relate some common questions that arise regarding mincha. The Rema (233, 1) writes that **in a pressing situation one could daven mincha after sunset as long as it is before three stars emerge.** (בדיעבד או בשעת הדחק יצא אם מתפלל מנחה עד הלילה דהיינו עד צאת הכוכבים (בית יוסף בשם אהל מועד ורשב"א).) Bier halacha quotes Seder Zemanim who says that this shemoneh esrei **should be said with the following condition. If it is still time to daven mincha then what I am saying now will count as mincha and the shemonah esrei I will daven later will count as maariv. However, if it is really time to daven maariv then the shemoneh esrei I am davening now will count as maariv and the shemoneh esrei I will daven later will count as tashlumin (makeup) for mincha.** Or Letzion (15, 4) explains that **this condition can only be made if the mincha and maariv shemoneh esrays are identical, for example they are both regular weekday shemoneh esrays. However, if they aren’t, for example, if night is Rosh Chodesh, then just daven a regular mincha and maariv without a stipulation.**

Another prevalent question pertaining to mincha is as follows. **Is it better to daven mincha before sunset sitting down or after sunset but standing up (for example if someone is a passenger in a car that is stuck in traffic)?** The Eshay Yisrael (23, footnote 51) quotes Rav Chaim Kanievsky who says that **it is better to do the former.**

The Mishna Berurah writes (679, 2) that **one should preferably daven mincha before lighting candles erev Shabbos on Chanukah.** The Shar Hatzeon (679, 7) explains that the candles represent the next night. Mincha represents that day. Thus, one who lights first creates a situation that looks like a contradiction. Meaning, when one lights, this symbolizes that it is the next day. If he then returns and davens mincha this demonstrates that it is the previous day. Shaarei Teshuva quotes Birchai Yosef who offers another reason. Mincha corresponds to the korban tamid which was brought before the menorah was lit in the Beis Hamikdash. **If the only minyan is after candle lighting then it is better to daven after lighting with a minyan than to daven before lighting without a minyan.**