

Parashat Chayei Sarah

When God speaks, many of us are like people in a fog. We give no answer. You will recall from Exodus 3 that when God called Moses, he immediately replied, 'Here I am'. Spiritual Readiness means a right relationship with God and a knowledge of where we are at present. Often, we are too busy telling God where we want to go and what we want to do. True readiness for God means that we are ready to do the tiniest little thing or the great big thing. Actually, the ready person never needs to get ready. My favourite supports to Bible reading are the works of Oswald Chambers. He put "Here I am' and 'I will go" very well, when he wrote, "The burning bush is a symbol of everything that surrounds the ready soul, it is ablaze with the presence of God."

The stories of Abraham and his descendants appear patriarchal, so it is interesting that the first death to be recorded in the tribe is that of Sarah, at the age of 127. I suppose it is because she is the mother of Israel. Indeed, the title, Hayyei-Sarah, means the 'life of Sarah' And so, at the start, we have the detail of Sarah's burial and its sorrow for Abraham, Isaac, and others, but the portion ends with the wedding of Isaac and Rebekah. In that sense Sarah will live on through Isaac's wife, Rebekah.

By purchasing the cave of Machpelah for Sarah's burial, Abraham secures his first fragment of the land which had been promised him when he first set out from Haran. Long ahead, when the Israelites return from bondage, they will be returning to a Canaan where their forefather Abraham lived as a wandering stranger , but where at least he was buried in a piece of land that they could call their own.

Before Abraham dies he ensures that his son, Isaac, will not marry into the pagan people that surrounded the tribe. This lovely story of the wooing of Rebekah, so beautifully told that one might almost believe that the Bible was designed to be read as literature, brings a wife to Isaac, back from the early homeland of Abraham. You will, I am sure, as regular and ardent readers of scripture, be familiar with this story. If not, you ought to be!

In this story, the work of Divine Providence merges with certain fine human qualities exhibited by both Abraham's servant, Eliezer, and Bethuel's daughter, Rebekah. It is a fact that when Divine Providence interacts with faithful character, happiness and inner peace are the results. For such to be achieved, a listening ear, a readiness to obey, and the will-power to stay the distance, are essential requirements. Let us ponder first of all, the manner in which Divine Providence works. Eliezer, faithful steward of Abraham's property, in obedience to his master, goes out to find a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac. Why Isaac did not go, I know not. Abraham, a man of great faith, tells Eliezer that God will smooth the way on his journey, and the servant makes a vow to do what he has been told. Here we see a man who has learned well from his master and that master's faith. There was no "iffing or butting", just a resounding 'I will go" and a display of sturdy trust and stickability.

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Eliezer took 10 camels and headed for northern Mesopotamia, to Nahor. We note that when he reached the communal well on the town's outskirts, he prayed, asking God for further direction, 'Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and keep your promises to my master. Here I am at the well where the young women will come to get water. I will say to one of them, 'Please, lower your jar and let me have a drink.' If she says, 'Drink, and I will also bring water for your camels,' may she be the one You have chosen for Your servant, Isaac." Before he had even finished praying, it happened just like that.

Eliezer has a lesson to teach us. Before any actual service, let us talk with God about it. Before we go to our work, let us know what we are at and on what footing we stand. The great Charles Spurgeon once put it, "I charge you, my fellow servants, never to go forth to plead with men for God until you have first pleaded with God for men." Eliezer, the faithful servant, is a fine exemplar of that pleading.

Rebekah at the well exhibits fine qualities. She appears to have a beautiful and helpful character, revealing a generosity, a readiness to help and to serve, without any thought of the bother it would cause her. For instance, "Drink, my lord.....and I will draw water for your camels also....." Camels drink a great volume, and there were ten to water - this was an especially fine service, given that Eliezer was a stranger. He must have watched in awe as Divine Providence and human, willing service, warped and weft. Another splendid trait of Rebekah's was hospitality. In responding to Eliezer's request for a spot of board and lodge, she replied, "We have both straw and provender, and room to lodge in"....and the damsel ran and told them of her mother's house these things (OKJ). What did Eliezer do? The right thing - he gave God the praise. He knelt down and worshipped the Lord, "Praise the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has faithfully kept His promise to my master. The Lord has led me straight to my master's relatives."

Rebekah's brother, slippery Laban, having seen the magnificent jewellery bestowed as gifts to Rebekah, was out to that well like a whippet, re-iterating the invitation to stay awhile. Mind you, even he spotted that this man, Eliezer, was blessed by the Lord, and said so.

Back in the house, Eliezer refuses to eat, 'Until I have said what I have to say.' He states his mission on behalf of Abraham. Laban, along with Rebekah's father, Bethuel, see the hand of God in all this. "'Since this matter comes from the Lord, we can't say anything bad or good. Rebekah is here in front of you; take her and go.' When Eliezer heard this, he prostrated himself on the ground to Adonai." Well, after a spot of jiggery-pokery about the departure date, Laban calls Rebekah to them. "And they called Rebekah and said to her, 'Will you go with the man?' And she said, 'I will go'" This was the moment of decision for Rebekah. Spurgeon sums it up...."The God of heaven speaks to men by His Spirit. The Spirit strives with men; He calls, and they refuse; He stretches out His hands, and they regard Him not. Though we have ears to hear, we neglect His munitions, and if we do not despise His teachings, yet too often we forget them and listen to the follies of earth instead of regarding the wisdom of

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the skies.”

But Rebekah’s ear was well-tuned to the Spirit of God. She surely felt, after hearing what Eliezer had had to say, that a plan formed and designed by God’s providence was now set in motion. Her name, together with her prospective husband’s, would become famous in all the countries of the world, even to the end-time. The purpose for which she entered this life was now opening before her. The hand of God was in this matter. She seized the moment, with decisiveness and resolution: “I WILL GO!”

It is not to ‘highfalutin’ to say that God has a purpose for your life, if you have the ear to hear and a will to obey. The Brit Hadashah reading told the story of the meeting of Yeshua with the Samaritan woman, at another well. During the discourse, Yeshya says...“Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life.” As with the Samaritan, as with Rebekah, Eliezer, Abraham, and countless others down the ages, the invitation is individual in character and the appeal is to the will - WILL YOU GO? Life does take on a different meaning when you can say decisively and resolutely to the Good Shepherd, “I WILL GO.”