

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

CHESSED

Often, we see certain things in the weekly Parsha that relate, in some way, to current events. I can't help but notice how true this is in the series of Parshiot we have been reading.

Lech L'cha: there is disagreement, machloket, between Lot and Avraham, which leads them their separate ways: - one goes to the RIGHT and one goes to the LEFT; Avraham tries to avoid a confrontation and says: we shouldn't argue, WE ARE BROTHERS; and then there is a war and there is PIDYON SH'VUYIM - redemption of captives; there is a covenant where Gd promises Avraham all the land of ten Canaanite nations; but precedes this promise with the information that there will be trouble and affliction beforehand - taking and keeping the Land will only be through YISURIM ('three gifts were given to Israel and they were only given through yisurim: Torah, the Land of Israel, and olam haba' -Sifrei, Va'etchanan).

In Vayeira, we learn of the cruel and uncivilized behavior of the cities of Sodom (sound familiar?); Yitzchak comes close to being killed but is

saved and goes from there to learn in Yeshivat Sheim. (see Yonatan ben Uziel).

Chayei Sarah: Rivka comes on the scene. What is interesting in this Parsha in so far as how it would relate to what is going on now, is the explanation the Maharal gives to the episode of Eliezer and Rivka.

Eliezer gives Rivka "a golden nose ring, its weight a beka and two bracelets... ten gold shekels their weight". In citing the Midrash, Rashi tells us that 'beka' is a hint to the 'beka', the sh'kalim the Jews would bring in the future for the acquisition of daily sacrifices, and the two bracelets hint to the two tablets, luchot, on which the Ten Commandments were written, hinted to by the weight of the gold. The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) sees in these things - and in Rivka herself - the three things upon which the world stands: Torah, Avoda, and Gemilut Chassadim. The Luchot represent Torah, the sh'kalim represent the avoda (that would be done in the Beit HaMikdash) and Rivka herself epitomizes acts of Chessed. But then he arrives at an incredible conclusion. The gifts that Eliezer puts on Rivka are only jewelry, accessories. Rivka is the main focus, the subject which they are "decorating". In other words,

Torah and Avoda are accessories to Gemilut Chassadim, which is the essence!

Using this understanding of the Maharal, I am forced to see the incredible ramifications. The Sh'la HaKadosh (Masechet P'sachim) as well as the Chatam Sofer in his Drashot, both emphasize how it is so important for a person to do chessed every day, to arouse chessed from Above and to strengthen Gd's trait of mercy. "...every day, our sins activate the strength of din - justice- against us, Gd forbid, therefore, a person must increase Gd's trait of rachamim by doing chessed." The Chofetz Chayim (Ahavat Chessed) says our doing chessed "arouses the trait of chessed Above", as the Zohar says: 'when the Jews do chessed with each other, it arouses the midat harachamim.' "There is a heichal of angels... who are appointed to receive the acts of chessed that a person does... and when the attribute of justice accuses, immediately, the angels show the chessed that was done and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, has mercy on Israel" (R. Moshe Cordovero, Zohar).

And, concluding, the Chofetz Chayim says, "Chazal tell us that HaShem says: if these people, who need chessed themselves, are showing

chessed to each other, I, Who am full of rachamim and chessed, how much more so must I perform chessed with my creations".

In case you haven't noticed, there is an awful lot of chessed going around the Jewish world now in all shapes and forms and among all "brands" of Judaism (as compared with a whole world going nuts with hatred and antisemitism). This is who we REALLY are. And this is the way we can, justifiably, expect the same from HaShem. We need it. What a shame that this had to come about the way it did. Let's go back to AL NA T'HI M'RIVA BEINI UVEINECHA... KI ANASHIM ACHIM ANACHNU - we are brothers!!

Please note: the Ba'al HaTurim (25:18) - the end of one Parsha tells of the death of Yishma'el - AL P'NEI KOL ECHAV NAFAL - and the Torah immediately introduces Toldot Yitzchak. "To tell us that when Yishma'el falls in the 'end of days', ben David will then grow, for he is from the 'offspring' of Yitzchak". ✨