



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Three Times Backwards

At the end of the Amida we take three steps backwards.

With the action come the words OSEH SHALOM BIMROMAV, "He Who makes peace in His high places, may He make peace for us..."

The person who wants peace must be willing to step back a little or else nothing will ever happen.

This thought is linked by a Chassidic teacher with a series of incidents in today's sidra.

Wherever Avraham went, he looked for water, as does anyone who moves to a new location and thinks of settling there. He therefore dug wells in the valley of G'rar, but as soon as he had turned his back the local inhabitants filled in the wells.

Yitzchak met the same fate. Returning to G'rar, he dug his father's old wells a second time, but once more the local people stopped them up.

Yitzchak decided not to fight; if he were to find a home in that region, he would need to live at peace with his neighbours.

He went on to dig a third well which he called R'chovot, "Spaciousness", implying that the land was wide enough for everybody, but once again, for the sake of peace, he had to move on.

He finally settled at B'er Sheva, where at last a peace agreement was entered into with the local people.

Who had been right all along?

That is not the question. The question is, "After three episodes of enmity, how was peace arrived at in the end?"

The answer is, "By being prepared to take three steps backwards."

Difficult Children

Frustrated because of Rivka's barrenness, Yitzchak prayed to God and Rivka became pregnant with twins.

It was not an easy pregnancy. "The children struggled within her" (B'reishit 25:22).

God now said to her - perhaps through a prophet, perhaps through Avraham who was still alive (Ibn Ezra) - "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your bowels; one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger" (verse 23).

Rabbinic commentary asserts that

the widely differing destinies of the two children were evident even before their birth.

When Rivka passed a beit midrash, Jacob struggled to get out of the womb; when she passed an idolatrous shrine, Eisav wanted to get out. Their struggle presaged their later rivalry, each holding opposing views.

The point is made sharper by the words, "Two peoples shall be separated from your innards". This is probably not a reference to childbirth but means, "While they are still within you they will be different."

An analogy is a verse about Samson in Sho-f'tim 13:5, "The child shall be a Nazirite to God MIBETEN, from the womb."

Unless we read the passage this way there is no point in telling Samson's mother not to take wine or strong drink while she is pregnant. Since Nazirites must not have wine or strong drink, the child in the womb must already be treated as a Nazirite.

-OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH