



ארגון רבני צהר



הסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

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Parashat Chayei Sarah

Faith that Shapes Reality

-Rabbi Tzachi Lehman-

The more people that participate in a given event, the more complex the nature of the event becomes, since the multiplicity of perspectives and variance in opinions exhibited by the different participants creates a multi-faceted layer of contemplation of the event itself. By extension, the nature of the focus of the event will necessarily come into question.

In our parasha the Torah describes the charge placed by Avraham on “his servant, the elder of his house” to go to Aram Naharayim in order to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. Here too one may ask: what is the focus of the story? At first glance there appear to be two options: the focus is either on the servant, who is the principal character in the story, and his loyalty to Avraham, or on the mission to bring back a wife for Yitzchak – i.e. the task with which the servant was charged and which caused him to travel to Aram Naharayim. At the same time, the very fact that the story is placed within the context of the stories describing Avraham and his character is instructive of the fact that Avraham himself is most likely the focal point of the story. The question then is: why is this so?

In order to answer this question, we must first take a closer look at the beginning of the story:

Avraham calls in his servant, the elder of his house, and adjures him not to take a wife for Yitzchak from the daughters of Canaan, but to travel to Avraham’s birthplace and find a wife there. The servant turns to Avraham with a question: “Perhaps the woman will not wish to go after me to this land. Shall I return your son to the land from which you came?” Avraham responds: “Beware, lest you return my son back there.” A tone of voice often transmits a more powerful message than the words themselves. When I read this verse I hear Avraham roaring: “Beware, lest you return my son back there!” The servant’s question touches a nerve with Avraham and therefore he responds so forcefully that the servant should not even consider the possibility of returning Yitzchak to Aram Naharayim. Avraham continues as follows: “The Lord, God of the heavens, Who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and Who spoke about me, and Who swore to me, saying, ‘To your seed will I give this land’ He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman will not wish to go after you, you will be absolved of this, my oath; only do not return my son back there.” It is this statement that underscores the entire interaction and it is also the reinforcement needed by the servant to instill in him the confidence in the success of his mission. This statement also serves to shape the servant’s behavior once he arrives at his destination, as noted in the Torah: “And he made the camels kneel outside the city beside the well of water, at eventide, at the time the maidens go out to draw water. And he said, ‘O Lord, the God of my master Avraham, please cause to happen to me today, and perform loving kindness with my master, Avraham. Behold, I am standing by the water fountain, and the daughters of the people of the city are coming out to draw water. And it will be, [that] the maiden to whom I will say, ‘Lower your pitcher and I will drink,’ and she will say, ‘Drink, and



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I will also water your camels,' it is she who You have designated for Your servant, for Yitzchak, and through her may I know that You have performed loving kindness with my master.”

There are commentators who suggest that Avraham's statement was in fact a prayer, while others suggest that it was a prophecy. Rashbam, on the other hand, suggests that it was neither a prayer nor a prophecy, but rather an expression of confidence and faith. Avraham was sure that Hashem did not bring him from Aram Naharayim and promise him the inheritance of the Land only in order to have his son return to Aram Naharayim. According to this understanding of the text, the focus of the story is not the servant, despite him being the principal character in the sequence of the events. Yitzchak is also not the focus of the episode, even though the entire mission revolved around finding a wife for him and bringing her home to him. The focus of the story, then, is the faith and confidence exhibited by Avraham in Hashem's promise and in the power of such expression to create reality. It is Avraham's faith and resolve that form the basis for the servant's actions and it is by their virtue that Rivka arrived to be wed to Yitzchak without Yitzchak having to leave the Land of Israel. Even when the servant was forced to convince Rivka's family to agree to allow her to accompany him to Canaan, the servant's confidence in the providential hand that had guided Rivka to him never wavered, which ultimately led Rivka's family to proclaim that “the matter has emanated from Hashem.” The message for us, then, is that the power to create and generate change ultimately rests with the confidence and faith exhibited by the leader. This is what serves as the prime motivator of people and what eventually shapes reality.

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