Parshas Chayei Sarah 5787

Wellsprings of Continuity

R' Aaron Lopiansky

Parsha Chayey Sara deals with two major topics - finding an appropriate burial spot for Sara and then finding an appropriate wife for Yitzchak. Yet in the background another very important process is taking place, and that is the end of Eliezer's being Avraham's apparent successor.

We find in last week's *parsha* that Avraham bitterly cried out to Hashem, "But Avraham said, 'Hashem, what can You give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer'" (*Bereishis* 15:2). It seems that the complaint is not merely the fact that he does not have a child to leave his legacy to, but rather that the person who is destined to take over is severely deficient. One might have thought that this meant that Eliezer was not a particularly faithful disciple of Avraham. But Rashi explains the term "Damesek" used to describe Eliezer as meaning, "the one who ladles out the teachings of his *rebbi*." This seems to be an extraordinary endorsement of Eliezer as a student who spends his time disseminating the teachings of his rebbe! Could he have asked for anything more?

We then find in our *parsha* Eliezer subtly hinting to Avraham that he also has a daughter who is possibly eligible to marry Yitzchak. Avraham rebuffs him and tells him that, "my son is 'blessed' while you are 'cursed', and the 'blessed' cannot join the 'cursed'" (Rashi 24:39.) Avraham is referring to the fact that Eliezer descends from Cham who is cursed to become a slave (*Bereishis* 9:26). And yet, Eliezer is so devoted to Avraham and seemingly so gifted; wouldn't we think that he has transcended his limitations?

Indeed, at the end of the *parsha,* the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 60:7) points out that at this point Eliezer has overcome his "accursedness" and is now appropriately blessed. How exactly do we define this cursedness, and where do we find some change in Eliezer's approach and understanding which constitutes his overcoming it?

Let us first define blessed in the following way: a blessing is something that is productive. The first blessing that Hashem endowed to creation and creatures was to, "go forth and multiply" (*Bereishis* 1:28). This means that anything static is not "blessed", regardless of how-high quality the statis thing is. Only that which can produce more than itself is considered to be "blessed". Eliezer was indeed able to ladle out the Torah of his rebbe, but he was limited to simply dishing out that which he had heard. Once he finished with that, there was no more forthcoming. It is like someone who has a lot of ready-to-eat food to divide among many people - no matter how much he has to give, it will eventually be finished. However, the person who has a tree which bears fruit will be able to constantly feed more people, as the tree keeps producing more and more fruit.

For Avraham's Torah to perpetuate, it is not enough that someone is there to distribute it. What is needed, rather, is someone that can become a wellspring and a continuous flow of Torah. Thus, Yitzchak, in contrast with Eliezer's ladling out that which there already was, reopened the very wellsprings of Avrohom (*Bereishis* 26:18).

We can detect a fascinating shift in Eliezer in this parsha. When he devises a test for the future bride of Yitzchok, he says, "let the maiden to whom I say, 'Please, lower your jar that I may drink,' and who replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels'- let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master." He tested her by seeing if she not only agreed to his requested drink but also added to it on her own!

This is an incredibly important paradigm for *Klal* Yisroel as a whole. When we speak of perpetuating *Klal* Yisroel, we talk about "observance", "keeping", etc. Torah and *mitzvos*. Such an approach always peters out. No matter how much "water" there is in the "cistern", it is finite and sadly comes to an end. Only by igniting a fire of passion for Torah, *tefillah* and *avodas* Hashem, does Torah and *mitzvos* last. There must be a sense of freshness, coming from the *neshama*'s wellspring, to assure us of continuity.

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