

Shabbat Kodesh: A Weekly Reader from Kodesh Press

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Kiddushin as a Model of Avodas Hashem

Izhbitzer Rebbe, Adapted by Rabbi Reuven Boshnack

“And Yitzchak prayed...” (Bereishis 25:21). The Zohar (Toldos 137a) explains that Yitzchak davened and tried to deal with the spiritual setback of not having children. In order to do this, he had to elevate himself to a place where there was no “complaint” that could interfere with his tefillos.

When Yaakov was born, the complaint against man’s conception was renewed. When Hashem wanted to create man, a complaint was issued against him. Man can rise to the heights, and take all of Creation with him, with his ability to choose to serve Hashem, but he can also fall to the depths through his choices not to serve Hashem. Therefore, Creation did not want to take a chance on man.

We see this in our lives as well. We appraise the spiritual danger as we strive for growth, but at the same time, there is the possibility of failure. A person’s spiritual growth is often referred to as an acquisition. We can understand the story and drama of man’s growth through the first Mishnah in Kiddushin which deals with marriage.

How does a person begin to serve Hashem when the outcome is not a given? By nature, a person does not want to enter into something whose outcome is not assured, as he thinks that there is a lot to lose. But Hashem shows him that nothing by itself is complete, and a person needs to “take a chance” in order to grow and perfect himself. This is comparable to the method of marrying someone called *kinyan kesef* (Kiddushin 2a), where the relationship is transactional: “You do this and I’ll do that. I’ll put something down, invest something into this relationship, and you’ll marry me.” In this kind of situation, both parties assume they will be rewarded.

The Zohar explains that if Avraham had not gone down to Mitzraim and not been purified there, he would not have his own unique nation. This phenomenon is referred to by the Targum as “the mighty works He does here on Earth.” Hashem showed His involvement in the world, that He presented us with the ability to make a difference. He made the world that our avodah effects. Even though a person might not have completed what he needed to do, he still is

credited with having some accomplishment. It is as if he has already gotten there.

This is comparable to the Mishnah’s case that one may marry someone with a *shtar*, a legal document testifying to their intent. Even though a woman must be married with something that has substantial worth, and a *shtar* is a document that has no intrinsic value, it talks about the process, and that’s why it works. Since he has begun the process through the creation of the *shtar*, the *shtar* has value. Then Hashem, who knows all hearts, “signs off” on his actions as a valid beginning. So too, a person’s avodas Hashem, once begun, is invested with the value of having made an accomplishment.

Adapted from Rabbi Reuven Boshnack, Pathways to the Heart

Two Agreements with One King

Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Avimelekh, king of the Philistines, twice turns to the patriarchs for a peace treaty. The first time is with Avraham (21:22–32) and the second is with Yitzhak (26:26–33). The two treaties show many parallels. In both cases, Avimelekh initiates the pact, after he sees God’s close connection with Avraham (“God is with you in everything that you do”) and Yitzhak (“We now see plainly that the Lord has been with you”). Both Avraham and Yitzhak respond by bringing up an earlier injustice: “Avraham reproached Avimelekh for the well of water which the servants of Avimelekh had seized” (21:25). Yitzhak asked, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you have been hostile to me and have driven me away from you?” (26:27). In both cases, the meeting ends with both sides swearing to an alliance which then gives the place (Beersheva) its name.

Onkelos Corner

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

Now, son, listen to my words as I instruct you (Genesis 27:8)

The Torah says *shema ve-koli*, which literally means “listen to my words.” Onkelos translates as *kabbel minni*, “accept from me.” — *Adapted from The Complete Targum Onkelos*

There is one essential difference between the two agreements. The agreement with Avraham was annulled with Avraham's death. Yitzhak had to re-dig "the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Avraham and which the Philistines had stopped up after Avraham's death" (26:18). In the case of the second agreement, with Yitzhak, Avimelekh and his advisor "departed from him in peace" (26:31). We never hear of the treaty being violated. Why not?

A closer look at the two narratives indicates some of the differences between Avraham and Yitzhak. Avraham immediately gives a positive answer to Avimelekh's request. He declares, "I swear it" (21:24). Only afterward does he point out the injustice done to him. Avimelekh asks Avraham to swear. Later we hear that they enacted a covenant. It takes Avimelekh's rather insincere apology ("I do not know who did this; you did not tell me, nor have I heard of it until today" – 21:26) for Avraham to trust him. Avraham tries to connect the pact to the fact that he dug the well in question: "You are to accept these seven ewes from me as proof that I dug this well" (21:30). Hazal disapproved: "God said to him: You gave seven ewes against my will.... By your life, know that the Philistines will kill seven righteous men for this...know that the Philistines will destroy the Mishkan seven times for this.... My Aron will return to the field of the Philistines for seven months" (Bereshit Rabba 54:4).

Yitzhak acts in a completely different way. First he presents his complaint to Avimelekh. Then, having established that Avimelekh is acting from a weaker position, Yitzhak agrees to enter talks. Avimelekh makes a request that he did not make of Avraham – "Let us enter a covenant." Yitzhak is only interested in an oath. Although Yitzhak hosts Avimelekh and his men graciously, he essentially sends them away empty-handed. By emphasizing the ethical gap which makes it impossible for the two to enter a covenant, Yitzhak arrives at a "cold peace" with Avimelekh. Ultimately, an agreement that reflects differences, rather than minimizing them, is the one that prevails.

Adapted from Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Starting Point

Inquiring of God

Samuel David Luzzatto, trans. Daniel A. Klein

The children beat each other in her womb, and she said, "If it is so, for what use am I (become pregnant)?" And she went to resort to the Lord. (25:22)

"to resort to the Lord (lidrosh et YHVH)." Rashi and Rashbam interpreted this expression as meaning "to inquire of the mouth of the Lord through one of the prophets." So Onkelos translated, and so agreed Clericus, Rosenmueller, and Mendelssohn. Nachmanides understood it as indicating prayer.

It seems to me that "to resort to the Lord" basically refers to prayer and entreaty for mercy; compare:

- "I sought [darashti] the Lord, and He answered me" (Ps. 34:5);
- "Seek Me [dirshuni] and live" (Amos 5:4);
- "Yet in his disease he sought [darash] not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (2 Chron. 16:12);
- "Yet the people turn not to Him that smites them, neither do they seek [darashu] the Lord Tseva'ot" (Isa. 9:12);
- "And from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him, when you resort to Him [tidreshennu] with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 4:29);
- "I gave access [nidrashti] to them that asked not for Me; I was at hand to them that sought Me not" (Isa. 65:1).

Now anyone who seeks is looking to find something, and finding God is done in one of two ways: either He saves the seeker and rescues him from his trouble, or He tells him the future. In these two ways, God reveals His providence and makes Himself available to people, all according to the time and place.

The opinion of most commentators is that Rebecca went to one of the prophets, some saying that she went to Shem, Clericus saying that she went to Melchizedek. In my opinion, however, she went to some place set aside for worship and solitude (perhaps, as per A.H. Mainster, the well Lahai Roi) and prayed to God, and she received the word of the Lord by means of prophecy or a dream.

Adapted from Daniel A. Klein, Shadal on Genesis