



This issue is dedicated in memory of
Zvi Hirsch ben Yehoshua Heschel ז"ל

DVAR TORAH RIVKA: KINDNESS, WISDOM, AND TACT

There are two slight difficulties in the Torah's story of Eliezer's meeting with Rivkah at the well:

1. Why did Eliezer say "Let me drink a little water **from your pitcher**" (Bereishit 24:17)? Why did he not just ask for water? Is it not clear that the water comes from her pitcher?
2. There is a subtle inconsistency between Eliezer's prayer and the actual account of their meeting; his sign to G-d was that Yitzchak's future bride would say, "And I will also give your camels to drink" – but Rivkah actually says, "I will give them to drink **until they finish drinking**" (Bereishit 24:19). Why the addition?

Harav Yosef Dov Ber Soloveitchik, זצ"ל, (1820-1892, Brisk, Lithuania, in his classic *בית הלוי* on the Chumash), explains that Eliezer's signs were not arbitrary; they were engineered to find a wife with a character fitting Avraham's son. Eliezer was looking for someone not only kind, but also wise and tactful. Some people's kindness is not properly thought out, and sometimes kindness is done awkwardly. Eliezer looked for a woman whose kindness was directed by wisdom and tact. Eliezer realized that even if he finds such a person, he would still need special Divine intervention to find such a woman from Avraham's family.

In order to find such a woman – kind, wise, and tactful – Eliezer asked if he could drink **right from the pitcher** – not for her to pour water into a cup – and waited to see how she would react. Would she have the kindness to give to a perfect stranger, especially one who asks to drink from the vessel itself ("Who knows where his mouth has been?")? But what if he really was sick? What would she do with the rest of the water? Just taking the rest of it home would not be smart; perhaps it is contaminated. Pouring out the rest of the jug would be an affront to the stranger, definitely not tactful. It would communicate to the stranger, "We do you a favor, but are worried about your standards of hygiene."

So the next thing Eliezer asked for was that the woman should offer to water his camels. That way he would be able to test her wisdom and tact. If she gave the rest of the water to the camels, she would be able to do chesed for the stranger without having to worry about drinking the rest of the water in the jug, and without offending the stranger by throwing out the rest of it. His camels drinking the water would solve all of the problems. Eliezer's test was to see if the woman would offer to give water to his camels, after he drank directly from the pitcher.

Rivka proved to be kind, wise and tactful – but a step ahead of Eliezer. She realized that if she merely pours out the remaining water from the pitcher into the camels' trough, it might be seen as a creative ploy to avoid drinking the rest of the water, possibly tainted by the stranger's saliva. Rivka then offered to give water to the camels **until they finish drinking**, not only taking care of the camels' thirst, but also avoiding any possibility of offending the unknown stranger. Rivka not only passed Eliezer's test with flying colors, she outdid his highest standards of kindness, wisdom, and tact.

SOURCE GUIDE: HOW WAS SARAH GREATER THAN AVRAHAM?

The Midrash says that Sarah's prophecy was greater than Avraham's. In an essay on the beginning of Chayei Sarah, the Netziv (Harav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, זצ"ל) asks: In what was her prophecy greater and how did that come to be? This source guide, based on the Netziv's essay, not only helps us appreciate Avraham's and Sarah's greatness, but has practical ramifications for our own avodat Hashem.

A. 2 Difficulties

The Netziv's starting point is the first verse of our parshah:

<p>1. Bereishit 23:1 The life of Sarah was one-hundred years, and twenty years, and seven years, the years of the life of Sarah.</p>	<p>בראשית כג:א וַיְהִי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שְׁנֵי חַיֵּי שָׂרָה.</p>
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The last three words seem superfluous; had the verse ended with the word שנים wouldn't we have known that Sarah's life lasted 127 years?

The Netziv raises a second difficulty, reacting to Chazal's comment on the following verse:

<p>2. Bereishit 21:12 G-d said to Avraham, "Do not be troubled about the youth and your maidservant. Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice, for the descendants that come through Yitzchak will be called your descendants."</p>	<p>בראשית כא:יב וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל אַבְרָהָם אַל יִרַע בְּעֵינֶיךָ עַל הַנְּעוּר וְעַל אֲמֹתָיךָ כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ כִּי בְיִצְחָק יִקְרָא לָךְ וְרַע.</p>
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Rashi (based on midrashim) comments:

<p>3. Rashi on Bereishit 21:12 Listen to her voice – to the Ruach Hakodesh (see source 5 below for a definition) within her voice. We have learned from here that Avraham was secondary to Sarah in prophecy.</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית כא:יב שמע בקולה - (בקול רוח"ק שבה). למדנו שהיה אברהם טפל לשרה בנביאות.</p>
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This is puzzling. The Torah records many of Avraham's prophecies, but only three words that He actually said to Sarah, "No, you laughed" (Bereishit 18:15). Furthermore, the passage in the Gemara that lists the seven prophetesses only brings allusions that Sarah had prophecy but no explicit verses:

<p>4. Megillah 14a Who are the seven prophetesses? They are Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chanah, Avigail, Chuldah, and Esther. Sarah – for it is written, [Haran was] "the father of Milkah and Yiskah" (Bereishit 11:29), and Rabbi Yitzchak says: Yiskah is Sarah. Why was she called Yiskah, for she gazed (סכה) with Ruach Hakodesh, for it says, "Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her voice."</p>	<p>מגילה יד. שבע נביאות מאן נינהו? שרה, מרים, דבורה, חנה, אביגיל, חולדה, ואסתר. שרה – דכתיב, "אבי מלכה ואבי יסכה" (בראשית יא:כט), ואמר רבי יצחק: יסכה זו שרה, ולמה נקרא שמה יסכה? שסכתה ברוח הקדש, שנאמר "כל אשר תאמר אליך שרה שמע בקולה."</p>
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B. Avraham and Sarah: Prophecy and Ruach Hakodesh

When we speak about a person receiving Divine revelation we refer to two separate things, says the Netziv:

<p>5. Haamek Davar Bereishit 23:1 For there are two separate things: Ruach Hakodesh (literally the spirit of holiness) is when a person meditates and the spirit of holiness rests upon him and he knows what he sees. But, indeed, Hashem does not speak with him. But prophecy (where Hashem actually speaks with him) is greater and loftier communication than Ruach Hakodesh, as we have explained.</p>	<p>העמק דבר על בראשית כג:א שהרי שני דברים הם: רוח"ק הוא מה שאדם מתבודד ומשרה עליו רוח"ק ויודע מה שרואה. אמנם לא דבר עמו ה'. ונבואה הוא בחינה גדולה ורבה מזה כמו שביארנו.</p>
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Avraham received more direct communication from G-d, classical prophecy, נבואה. But Sarah's Ruach

Hakodesh was greater. Note (see Harav Kuperman's footnotes on the Haamek Davar) that both Rashi and the Gemara focus on Sarah's Ruach Hakodesh, her prophetic vision. Hashem revealed more to Sarah about Yishmael's true nature and Yitzchak's centrality than He did to Avraham. That is behind Hashem telling Avraham to listen to whatever Sarah says.

How did Sarah come to have greater Ruach Hakodesh than Avraham? Here is the first of two reasons:

<p>6. Haamek Davar Bereishit 23:1 A. For Avraham, in his righteousness, was leading the world and directing them to serve Hashem. This is why he is referred to as the "Prince of G-d" in our parshah. Someone who is involved with the masses doesn't have so much of an opportunity to meditate in solitude. This was not the case for Sarah, who remained in her tent in holiness and purity (see what the Gaon Chatam Sofer, דצ"ל, wrote in his introduction, words that are fitting for himself).</p>	<p>העמק דבר על בראשית כג: א: א' שאברהם בצדקו היה מנהיג העולם ומדריכם לעבודת ה' וכמו שכ' לפנינו "נשיא אלקים" ויבואר לפנינו. ומי שעסקו עם המון רבה אינו יכול להתבודד כל כך. משא"כ שרה היתה יושבת באהלה בקדושה וטהרה (וע' מש"כ הגאון חתם סופר בהקדמתו בזה דברים ראויים אליו ד"ל).</p>
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There is a second reason why Sarah's Ruach Hakodesh was superior:

<p>6. Haamek Davar Bereishit 23:1 The second reason is that Ruach Hakodesh only rests upon a person in a state of spiritual joy, simchah of a mitzvah. Sarah's righteousness was amazing, for her trust in Hashem was very powerful and lofty. This is how it is expressed in Midrash Rabbah: Sarah said to Avraham Avinu, "You have been promised [by G-d] and I have trust [in Him]." Concerning someone who approaches with the power of a Divine promise, our Sages, of blessed memory, said that the righteous cannot rely on promises in This World because sin by cause it to be retracted (see what we wrote above in Bereishit 14:10). This was not the case for Sarah, who had strong faith and trust without any promises. She therefore did not become sad for all of her days, and was therefore immersed in Ruach Hakodesh.</p>	<p>העמק דבר על בראשית כג: א: שנית, דאין רוה הקודש חל אלא מתוך שמחה של מצוה ושרה זה צדקתה להפלא שהיתה באמונתה בבטחון חזק מאד נעלה כמו שמבואר ברבה שאמרה שרה לאברהם אבינו, "את בהבטחה ואני באמונה." ומי שבה מכת הבטחה ידוע מאמרם ז"ל אין הבטחה לצדיקים בעוה"ז שמה יגרום החטא. וע' מש"כ לעיל י"ד י'. מה שאין כן שרה שהיתה חזקה באמונתה בלי שום הבטחה, על כן לא נתעצבה בכל ימי חייה והיתה שקועה ברוה הקודש.</p>
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We can now explain the seemingly extraneous three words at the end of the first verse of our parshah, "שני חיי שרה", "the years of the life of Sarah." The Netziv points out that the word חיים is used in two different ways in the Tanach:

- Most of the time it means "life," the opposite of death.
- But there are times that the word חיים means "liveliness," joyous life, as in Devarim 4:4:

<p>7. Haamek Davar Devarim 4:4 And you, who clung to Hashem your G-d are all alive today: Through being involved in Torah you reached a state where you are all alive today. This refers to vitality of the soul; you are joyous in your connectedness to G-d.</p>	<p>העמק דבר על דברים ד: ד: ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם חיים כלכם היום: הגעתם ע"י עסק התורה להיות חיים כולכם היום חיות הנפש ושמחים בדבקות בה'.</p>
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This is also the meaning of חיי שרה at the end of our verse: Sarah lived with constant joy. The beginning of the verse tells us how long she lived, 127 years; the end of the verse tells us that those were years of vitality and joy. **Sarah not only lived, she was alive.**

Avraham and Sarah represent for us two aspects of our service of Hashem: the life "inside the tent" of meditation, joy, and elevated inner insight; and also the life "outside the tent" of serving Hashem through our daily affairs, through war, treaties, negotiations, through our interactions with people. Avraham received more prophetic communications, while Sarah – inside the tent – had a higher level of Divine insight.

127 YEARS, 127 PROVINCES BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 58:3) relates: Rabbi Akiva was sitting and expounding words of Torah, and the audience was falling asleep. He wanted to wake them up; he said, "In what merit did Esther rule over 127 nations? Let Esther the descendant of Sarah, who lived 127 years, come and rule over 127 nations."

Perhaps this was only a superficial witticism, but, more likely, even Rabbi Akiva's wake-up remarks bear deep significance. The question, simply put, is: מה הקשר? – What is the connection?

Answers Harav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, שליט"א, in Birkas Mordechai (p. 214): Sarah was also a ruler. But her dominion was comprised not of nations or states, but of years. Sarah was ruler over each one of her 127 years.

To rule over time is one of the great challenges we all face. To rule over time means that we imbue every moment of our fleeting existence with eternal life. Time – our years – is ours to be filled with Torah and mitzvot, with chesed and relationships.

But we have a saying: "עבדי הזמן עבדי עבדים המה" – "Slaves of time are truly slaves of slaves" (the beginning of one of Harav Yehudah Halevi, זצ"ל's poems). These are people who allow events that take place within time to determine who they are, whose days remain essentially empty. For them, the days and years of their lives are not moments to be transformed into a life of eternity. Rather, every passing moment is a countdown towards death.

Sarah was master of her days and years. Every one of her 127 years acknowledged her sovereignty. If she could succeed so well at the supreme challenge of life, is it any wonder that her grand-daughter Esther would succeed at something as simple as being the queen of 127 nations?

שבת שלום ומבורך

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**We continue to pray for a רפואה שלימה, a complete healing,
for all those wounded in the attacks against our People, בתוך כל חולי ישראל.**