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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH LISTEN TO ME

It is striking how many times different forms of the verb שמע – listen – appear in the Torah's account of Avraham's negotiations with the בני הית, the Hittites. Avraham's opening, "I am a stranger and a dweller among you; give me an owned burial plot among you so I can bury my dead from before me" (Bereishit 23:4), is followed by an exchange where every speech includes either "listen to me" or "listen to us."

1) "שְׁמַעְנוּ" – Listen to us," the Hittites respond to Avraham, calling him a master and a prince of G-d. Every one of them expresses willingness to give up their own burial plot so Avraham can bury Sarah. 2) "שְׁמַעְנִי" – Listen to me," Avraham answers, if you really want to help me bury her. Let me speak with Efron, because I want to buy the Cave of the Machpelah at the edge of his field at its full price – no gifts or discounts. 3) "No, my master, שְׁמַעְנִי – listen to me," Efron begins. He makes sure all of the assembled Hittites are within earshot, then says: Both the field and the cave are as good as given to you as presents so you can bury your dead. 4) "שְׁמַעְנִי" – Listen to me," Avraham replies. I've already set aside money to pay for the burial plot and I want you to take it. I don't want it as a gift. 5) "אֲדַנִּי שְׁמַעְנִי" – Listen to me, my master," responds Efron. What is four hundred silver pieces for people like us for this piece of property? And now you can bury your dead.

Why do each of these five stages of the negotiations include a request that the other listen? No one seems to be distracted and no one seems to be hard of hearing. Why does each side say "Listen to me"?

Avraham and the Hittites are both worried about being misunderstood. When the Hittites sense that Avraham wants to buy his own burial plot – an אחריות קבר – they make it clear that every Hittite is willing to give up their own and hand it over to Avraham. But Avraham then has to make it clear that he has a very specific place in mind, the Cave of the Machpelah at the edge of Efron's field, and he wants to purchase it at full price. Then Efron needs to make it clear that he is willing to give it as a present. But, once again, Avraham insists on paying and says that he has set aside money for it – it is as good as given. Efron then makes what seems to be a radical transition and makes it clear that the price is four-hundred silver pieces. Finally, the Torah says, "וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם" – Avraham listens to Efron." He understands, as the Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a) observes, that Efron is one of those רשעים – evil people – who say they're going to do a lot but then end up doing nothing.

"וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָהָם" - Avraham understood Efron," as the Torah says. Unfortunately, that was not matched by a parallel "וַיִּשְׁמַע עֶפְרוֹן." Efron did not appreciate Avraham's goals, the meaning of eternal life and the resurrection of the dead, Avraham's connection with the Land of Israel, and what burial means for a righteous woman like Sarah.

Not only Avraham and, להבדיל, the pagan Hittites, but any two parties who come from different mindsets are challenged to find the right words to express what each really wants to communicate to the other. But each is also challenged to listen, to understand what is really behind the words they hear. It is a skill, perhaps an art, to communicate what we are really thinking to another who does not share our basic assumptions. But it is no less a skill to truly understand what another is really trying to communicate. That is the art of listening.

SOURCE GUIDE: THE SUN RISES, THE SUN SETS

“One tzaddik does not die before another tzaddik has already been born: ‘The sun rises, the sun sets’ (Kohelet 1:5). Rivkah was born before Sarah passed away,” says the Midrash on our Parshah. The Midrash lists many other examples of this phenomenon. For example, Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi was born on the day Rabbi Akiva died and Rav Ada bar Ahavah was born on the day Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi died. This seems to be more than just an interesting historical observation, but, rather, a spiritual principle. What is behind the principle of “One sun rises before the previous one has set”? This source guide is built on that Midrash.

A. One Tzaddik Rises Before the Next Sets

The Midrash opens with the obvious difficulty with the verse in Kohelet:

<p>1. Bereishit Rabbah 58:2 “The sun rises and the sun sets” (Kohelet 1:5) – Said Rav Abba bar Kahana: Do we not know that the sun rises and sets? Rather, [the verse should be read as saying] before the Holy One, blessed be He, sets the sun of one tzaddik (righteous person), He causes another tzaddik’s sun to rise. On the day that Rabbi Akiva passed away Rabbeinu (Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi) was born, and they saw him as being referred to in the verse “The sun rises and the sun sets.” On the day that Rabbeinu passed away Rav Ada bar Ahavah was born, and they saw him as being referred to in the verse “The sun rises and the sun sets.” On the day that Rav Ada bar Ahavah passed away Rabbi Abun was born, and they saw him as being referred to in the verse “The sun rises and the sun sets.” On the day that Rabbi Abun passed away Abba Hoshaya the man of Tarya was born. On the day that Abba Hoshaya the man of Tarya passed away Rabbi Hoshaya was born, and they saw him as being referred to in the verse “The sun rises and the sun sets.”</p>	<p>בראשית רבה נח:ב “וזרח השמש ובא השמש” (קהלת א:ה) – א”ר אבא בר כהנא: וכי אין אנו יודעין שזרח השמש ובא השמש? אלא, עד שלא ישקיע הקב”ה שמשו של צדיק הוא מזריח שמשו של צדיק חבירו. יום שמת ר”ע נולד רבינו וקראו עליו “וזרח השמש ובא השמש.” יום שמת רבינו נולד רב אדא בר אהבה וקראו עליו “וזרח השמש ובא השמש.” יום שמת רב אדא בר אהבה נולד רבי אבון וקראו עליו “וזרח השמש ובא השמש.” יום שמת ר’ אבון נולד ר’ אבון בריה. יום שמת ר’ אבון נולד אבא הושעיא איש טריא. יום שמת אבא הושעיא נולד רבי הושעיה וקראו עליו “וזרח השמש ובא השמש.”</p>
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It continues with examples from Tanach:

<p>2. Bereishit Rabbah 58:2 Before He caused Moshe’s sun to set He caused Yehoshua’s to rise, as it says, “Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take Yehoshua ben Nun’” (Bamidbar 27:18). Before Yehoshua’s sun set Otniel ben Knaz’s rose, as it says, “Otniel ben Knaz captured it (the city of Kiryat Sefer)” (Yehoshua 15:17). Before Eli’s sun set Shmuel’s rose, as it says, “G-d’s candle had not yet gone out and Shmuel was lying in Hashem’s Temple” (I Shmuel 3:3) ... Until the Holy One, blessed be He, caused Sarah’s sun to set He caused Rivkah’s sun to rises. First, “Behold Milkah had also given birth to children (including Rivkah)” (Bereishit 22:20), and afterwards [the Torah tells us] “The life of Sarah was a hundred years ...” (Bereishit 23:1).</p>	<p>בראשית רבה נח:ב עד שלא השקיע שמשו של משה הזריח שמשו של יהושע, שנאמר, “ויאמר ה’ אל משה קח לך את יהושע בן נון” (במדבר כז:יח). עד שלא שקעה שמשו של יהושע זרחה שמשו של עתניאל בן קנז, שנאמר “וילכדה עתניאל בן קנז” (יהושע טו:יז). עד שלא שקעה שמשו של עלי זרחה שמשו של שמואל; “ונר אלקים טרם יכבה ושמואל שוכב בהיכל ה’” (שמואל א’ ג:ג) ... עד שלא השקיע הקב”ה שמשו של שרה הזריח שמשו של רבקה. בתחלה “הנה ילדה מלכה גם היא בנים” (בראשית כב:כ) ואח”כ “ויהיו חיי שרה מאה שנה” (בראשית כג:א).</p>
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Rav Abba bar Kahana raises a difficulty with the verse – doesn’t it just state an obvious fact? – and answers with his new reading: One tzaddik-sun rises before another tzaddik-sun sets. His reading is probably striving to solve an additional difficulty: isn’t the verse wordy? Couldn’t it have just said “The sun rises and sets”? Apparently, he answers, the verse refers to two different suns, different tzaddikim, one setting, the other rising.

B. A Constant Stream of Tzaddikim

What is the reason behind this spiritual principle? The author of the Yefeh Toar commentary on Midrash Rabbah (an abridged version is printed in some editions of Midrash Rabbah), Harav Shmuel Yafeh Ashkenazi, זצ"ל (Turkey, 1525-1595) writes:

<p>3. Yefeh Toar on Bereishit Rabbah 58:2 This comes from the Providence of Hashem, may He be blessed, that the generation should not be orphaned from a tzaddik that protects it and teaches it effectively ... And even though fear of G-d is not in Heaven's hands, we have already answered that since Hashem, may He be blessed, knows the way of future tzaddikim, He divides them up among the generations so some of them will be found in each generation.</p>	<p>יפה תואר על בראשית רבה נח:ב זה מהשגחת ה' יתברך בעולם שלא יהא הדור אלמון מצדיק מגין עליו ומלמדו להועיל ... ואף על פי שיראת שמים אינה בידי שמים כבר תירצנו שם שהשם יתברך שיודע דרך צדיקים העתידים מחלקם בדורות שימצאו קצתם בכל דור ...</p>
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The Maharal (Harav Yehudah Loewe, זצ"ל, 1525-1609) explains that because a tzaddik is characterized by tzedek (righteousness), which is lasting and eternal, that tzedek must live on through the next tzaddik:

<p>4. Netivot Olam – Netiv Hatzedakah Chapter 1 For the tzaddik, since he has צדק, righteousness – which exists eternally, and for that reason the verse says, “The tzaddik [has an] eternal foundation” (Mishlei 10:25), and has an intense level of lasting existence – therefore only leaves the world when a similar tzaddik is born. For then that righteousness, which has lasting existence, remains without interruption.</p>	<p>נתיבות עולם – נתיב הצדקה פרק א' שהצדיק, מאחר שיש לו הצדק שהוא דבר קיום נצחי, ומפני כך ג"כ כתיב “וצדיק יסוד עולם” (משלי י:כה), שיש לו מדריגת הקיום ביותר, ולפיכך אין צדיק נפטר מן העולם עד שנברא צדיק כמותו, שאז נשאר הצדק שהוא דבר שיש לו הקיום נשאר באין הפסק.</p>
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SHE BOUGHT A FIELD BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

The Torah pays tribute to our matriarch Sarah at the end of her life: “And the years of the life of **Sarah** were one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; the years of the life of **Sarah**. And **Sarah** died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron, in the Land of Canaan. And Avraham came to eulogize **Sarah** and to cry for her” (Bereishit 23:1-2). Here, Sarah's name is mentioned specifically four times.

However, as soon as Avraham completes this stage of his mourning, and begins negotiations with the Hittite “local council” to purchase the cave of Machpelah from Efron, Sarah's name ceases to be mentioned, every reference to her uses the impersonal noun “מת – dead”: “And Avraham arose from before his **dead** and he spoke to the children of Cheit, saying ‘... and let me bury my **dead** from before me.’ And the children of Cheit answered Avraham ‘... In the choicest of our graves bury your **dead**; not one of us would withhold his grave from you to bury your **dead**’ ... And he spoke with them, saying, ‘If it is your desire to bury my **dead** from before me . . .’ And Efron the Hittite answered Avraham ‘... bury your **dead**’ ... And he spoke to Efron, ‘... and I will bury my **dead** there’ ... And Efron answered Avraham, saying to him, ‘... and your **dead**, bury’” (Bereishit 23:3-15). In every statement throughout the parley, reference is made to Avraham's wife. Yet, eight times, Sarah is not referred to as “Sarah,” or even “wife,” but only “dead.”

Of course, this highlights the fact that only the body dies. The soul, Sarah's true essence, is eternal. This is implied in Ibn Ezra's comment on verse 3: “Before his dead: רמז לגוף – A reference to the body.”

However, the closing section of this passage – after Avraham weighs out the four hundred shekels of silver in the presence of all the inhabitants of the city to purchase the cave and the surrounding field – poses a problem: “And afterwards Avraham buried **Sarah his wife** in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which is Chevron, in the Land of Canaan. And the field, as well as the cave in it, became established for Avraham as a burial plot, from the children of Cheit” (verses 19-20). If it is only the body that is buried, why is Sarah mentioned once again by name, including the rather tender עדין ומרגש appellation “his wife,” at the time of her burial?

We can solve this difficulty through solving another difficulty. A number of commentaries take note that verses 19-20 say that the cave and field of Machpelah “became established for Avraham as a burial plot” after having said the same idea in verses 17-18. Ramban says that the Torah wishes to emphasize that this became a legitimate and universally recognized (even by the children of Cheit) possession of Avraham and his family. Moreover, it is, without question, “in the Land of Canaan,” and not in the Land of the Pelishtim, where Avraham lived heretofore (see Bereishit 21:34). Malbim (Harav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, זצ”ל, 1809-1879) adds that at first Machpelah became known as the family’s burial place, and then “the field” was designated as burial grounds, not to be used for planting.

As a result of this purchase, Avraham had an uncontested holding in the Land of Israel, fulfilling Hashem’s many promises to give him the Land.

And yet, Avraham realized that Hashem’s promise did not come easily. Our Sages (Sanhedrin 111a and Bava Batra 16a) explain that this episode is considered one of Avraham’s trials, demonstrating his outstanding steadfastness. Says Hashem: I said to Avraham, “Arise, walk about in the Land, along its length and breadth, for to you will I give it” (Bereishit 13:17). Nevertheless, when Avraham sought a place to bury Sarah he did not find one until he paid four hundred shekels of silver, yet he did not suspect My integrity. Maharsha explains (on Bava Batra 100a) furthermore, that based on this same verse, when Avraham traverses the Land he is laying claim to it, thus making it easier for his descendants to possess it. They will be inheritors of Avraham, not conquerors.

Out of all Hashem’s promises to Avraham, “Arise, walk about in the Land” posed the greatest challenge: While others might refer to Avraham’s descendants, this verse enables Avraham himself to lay claim to the Land by walking through it. The challenge to Avraham’s loyalty, therefore, is that he must pay so dearly for land that is already his! Or, rather, it should have been his. However, when he pays the price of the cave and field of Machpelah in the presence of the Hittites, the potential of “Arise, walk about in the Land” is realized.

Sarah has been Avraham’s lifelong partner in teaching the world about Hashem: “Avraham would convert the men and Sarah would convert the women” (Bereishit Rabbah 39:14). As the mother of Yitzchak, she is Avraham’s partner in beginning the creation of the Nation of Israel, thus fulfilling Hashem’s promise “And I will make you into a great nation” (Bereishit 12:2). Now, at the time of the acquisition of the cave of Machpelah, Sarah is again Avraham’s partner in realizing another of Hashem’s promises: Arise, walk about in the Land, along its length and breadth, for to you will I give it.

This is the meaning of the Midrash (Tanchuma Chayei Sarah 4) that sees in Eshet Chayil (Mishlei 31:10-31) a précis of Sarah’s life. On the verse (16): “She plans a field and acquires it” the Midrash says: “זממה שדה ותקחהו” – She planned and acquired the field of Machpelah and she was buried there, as it says, “And afterwards Avraham buried Sarah.”

In fulfilling Hashem’s promise, Sarah can be called – even after death – by name, as well as Avraham’s wife. Her soul – her values – live on. It is through the union of Avraham and Sarah that the Land of Israel becomes the rightful possession of the People of Israel.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell’s Daf Keshet:
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Hebrewbooks.org, and the Tanach section of Chabad.org.

We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.