

Everything Counts:

A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah חיי שרה is the 5th in the Annual Cycle of Weekly Torah Readings - Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31

by

Drew Kopf

The Sedrah or Parshas (portion of the Five Books of Moses read in synagogues on the Sabbath in an annual cycle) Chayei Sarah begins before it begins in the last few verses of the Parsha that precedes it; Vayeira (Genesis XVIII:1-XXII:24) וַיֵּרָא (literally: And He [the L-rd] Appeared) when, in Genesis XXII:20 we are provided with the knowledge of the existence of Rebecca and of how she is related to Abraham.

The driving force behind the sharing of the lineage of Rebecca is the blessing that was bestowed upon Abraham a few verses earlier still. Genesis XXII:17 “in blessing I will bless you and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...”

This is important. To appreciate just how important it is, let us understand that in just those few words everything was elevated. This becomes more than just a story of “boy meets girl”; as important at that is. It is bigger also than appreciating the continuation of Abraham’s and Sarah’s family and of the continuation of that family’s sphere of influence. “All the nations of the world shall be blessed.” This is far more than just “important.” This is huge.

But, before we go on into our Sedrah of Chayei Sarah, let us note what might be regarded as a bit of negativity in what otherwise appears to be an extremely positive blessing. Genesis XXII:17 “and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”

That actually sounds pretty positive on its face. “Possess the gate” sounds like victory. The numbers are at first, perhaps, a little unclear. “Thy seed;” does that mean all of Abraham’s offspring or just some of them or maybe even just one person somewhere down the line? When the Torah uses the word VeYeeRash, it actually means more than just possess. It comes from the word that means ‘to inherit;’ so “your seed will possess; as in inherit; as in ‘own through succession’ the gate of your enemies.” Is that one gate that will have been owned over time

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 1 of 65

by several or at least more than one enemy or is it one gate, i.e. “the gate,” that each and everyone of those who choose to oppose and or threaten and or try to do harm to them would have had as their own but which will, eventually become owned by the possession of and not just for a certain period of time but, as indicated by being an inheritance, forever, of the Jewish People.

What that gate is protecting or restricting entrance to or exit from is not defined or identified. What comes to mind is the gate to the Promised Land, which would have been owned by others and by intending to take it away from them, they would, most likely, become one’s enemies. But, in any case, it is pretty clear that the blessing comes with a down side promise within it; i.e. that inheriting the Promised Land “ain’t gonna be no cake walk.” There will be enemies in opposition.

Another thing about our Sedrah Chayei Sarah that harkens back to the Sedrah of Vayeira is just how important the selection of a proper wife for Isaac was to Abraham. Before we are actually introduced to Rebecca in Parshas Chayei Sarah we are told of her pedigree; that she is a descendant of Abraham’s brother Nahor.

The underlying reason for Abraham wanting his servant Eliezer to seek out a wife for his son Isaac from Charan, the area where he was born and raised, and from his family needs to be understood. How did Abraham make this determination? Let us understand that since discovering G-d, Abraham prospered in several ways; not the least of which was that he became exceedingly wealthy. He may have been a man without a country but wherever he sojourned he apparently prospered.

Abraham also shared his discovery of the L-rd being the one and only G-d with others with whom he came in contact apparently developed a following; a growing number of people who became as Abraham himself was, a convert to believing that there is only one G-d.

It would certainly be important to Abraham to make sure that the woman selected to be his son Isaac’s wife be of a similar persuasion; i.e. a believer that there is only one true G-d. What is not clear is why Abraham would reason that a woman from his parents’ family; his brother’s offspring, would be a person who believed that there is one G-d. There is no evidence that his brother or his brother’s offspring converted to Abraham’s religious beliefs. There is nothing that indicates that in the text. In fact, since Abraham has to give all kinds of details about where his brother and his brother’s family are located in order that Eliezer will be able to locate the proper people and that Abraham does not mention any of the possible women candidates let alone Rebecca, there was apparently no relationship

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 2 of 65

between Abraham and his brother. So, it is more than doubtful that they believed in the one and only G-d. Surely, they did not.

Still, the only thing that seems to matter to Abraham is that the woman to be Isaac's wife should under no circumstances be from the Canaanites but, rather, that she be selected from Abraham's family.

One must ask when Abraham is seeking a wife for his son Isaac, why would a woman convert not have been an even better selection. At least such a woman would be a believer that there is only one G-d. But, it is a clearly expressed imperative from Abraham that the wife for Isaac be selected from that local and from that particular family with no actual reason being stated, but his orders are adhered to and, as the Parsha Chayei Sarah plays out, we see the results; i.e. Rebecca becomes betrothed to Isaac.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z"l, (1903 – 1993), The Rav, shed some light on this dilemma as noted in the book "Discourses of Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah" by Rabbi Avishai C. David, Urim Publications 2011, page 61:

"Since he (Abraham) carried a certain genetic code, he insisted that Eliezer choose only a wife from his family. In this search, Eliezer was guided by only one criterion 'chesed' (righteousness)."

The Rav explains that there are two types of or intensity levels of "chesed" (righteousness) and he defines each. One is rational and the other is irrational, which he refers to as "Rav Chesed" (abundant in loving kindness) as rational and "arichut apayim" which is the noun form of the adjective "erech apayim" as the irrational level of "chesed" where one has "the ability to respond with kindness even in the face of improper behavior from the potential recipient of that kindness." [Ibid page 61-62].

We would do well to stop here for a few moments to put what the Rav pointed out into perspective so that we can better appreciate the way Abraham thought, felt and acted when faced with issues of importance; no; of great importance; better yet, of monumental importance.

Surely, we have all heard people say, "I'll just put my faith in the L-rd and ..." But, that kind of statement, if they really mean what they are saying, is entirely unfair to the L-rd, shows the person who makes such a statement to be, at the very least, blatantly irresponsible, completely lazy and one who is unworthy of any meaningful consideration in anything he or she may say or do. Tough talk you may say. But, that is what one gets if one chooses to do absolutely nothing to help understand and deal with a serious situation, and, rather washes his or her

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 3 of 65

hands of responsibility for whatever may result from his or her inactivity and, instead, points to the Almighty as the one who will bring about the result.

What distinguishes us from the animals is that mankind has freedom of will to take action to help remedy situations to try to prevent certain things from happening, to do things that will hopefully improve the chances for the desired effects to take place. In short, to actively participate in trying to improve the world in which we live. We do not just follow our instincts and migrate south in the winter like Canada Geese or like the swallows that return to Capistrano each year. The swallows have no choice. Returning to Capistrano is in their DNA. It is their nature. They have to do it.

“I just put my faith in the L-rd and ... “

It is the word “just” that needs to be addressed. “Just” means to the exclusion of having done or doing anything else. Someone said, “The L-rd helps those who help themselves.” This may be the perfect or the quintessential example of that statement. Doing something to advance one’s situation, to improve ones chances for bringing about a desired outcome, to make things better for everyone, is in our power. But, we must first decide to do something to help our selves and, then, we must actually do what it is we have decided to do before we can be considered worthy of the L-rd’s attention so we may, finally, and deservingly “put our faith in the L-rd.”

Abraham was on “one-to-one” speaking terms with G-d and, yet, he seemed to know that his, Abraham’s, own personal efforts to keep what he started on track was the number one requirement that would allow Abraham to feel confident (read: have faith) that the L-rd would take care of the rest in the L-rd’s own way.

We could stop right here if we wanted to and let that notion of being an active participant in fostering one’s own self betterment and, ipso facto, in the betterment of the world, be what we refer to as the “take away” from Parshas Chayei Sarah and we would have done a lot. We are not here to just get through life. We are here to help; ourselves and one another. Then, when we have actually done all we could do, may we allow ourselves the privilege of putting our faith in G-d to take it the rest of the way for us.

You may ask, “What about those of us who are not able to think or to do anything to help ourselves or others; infants, babies, mentally impaired. What about them?” Everyone is still part of the equation. Those of us who need help are there for the rest of us to watch over and to help. One can only do what one can. But, whatever one can do, one must do or at least try to do before leaving the rest to the L-rd. That is one lesson we can learn from Parsahs Chayei Sarah where we observe Abraham in the launching of his search for a wife for his son

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 4 of 65

Isaac. He does all he can until he enlists the assistance of his servant and, in doing so, he puts his faith in the L-rd knowing that the rest will be in the L-rd's hands.

With that as a kind of retrospective overview to the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, let us now advance to the beginning with a better idea as to what was going on in the mind and heart of our patriarch Abraham as he faced the grief over the loss of his dear wife Sarah, vis-à-vis strategies to secure an appropriate burial place for her and then, to insure the continuance of what he had started by having discovered through his own reasoning the existence of the L-rd and having made a covenant with the L-rd by finding a wife for his son Isaac; the woman who would become the matriarch during the next segment of the journey of the Jewish people to Nationhood.

How important was this? It affected and continues to affect the entire world and everyone in it right up until today; to this very moment. Are the decisions that any of us make in our lives anywhere near as important and as big as the ones that our patriarch Abraham made as described in the Sedrah Chayei Sarah?

In deed they are.

Absolutely everything counts.

So, as we listen to the Sedrah Chayei Sarah chanted for the congregation or review it on our own with time to ponder, each of us would do well to ask ourselves, "How would I do what Abraham needed to do if I were Abraham?" And, then, take a breath and realize that that is exactly what the situation each of us is in with regard to absolutely every decision we are challenged to make and every accomplishment we challenge ourselves or are challenged to address and surmount.

Genesis Chapter XXIII verses 1 - 20 in its own way, or what might be called on the oblique, is one of the most pivotal sections of the entire Torah if one takes into account how much of what later transpires harkens back to the events described in it.

We are told the numbers of years that Sarah lived; i.e. 127, and then that she died and where it was that she died; i.e. in Hebron. The Torah is careful to tell us that Hebron is in the land of Canaan. Abraham had apparently been away since it says, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Of course, in the last Sedrah he had gone off with Isaac for the Akeidah, which certain commentators hold was the reason that Sarah died; i.e. from the shock of learning of the entire deed; the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. This reasoning would depend on Sarah not having the degree or level of faith in the

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](http://www.echelonartgallery.com) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 5 of 65

L-rd that Abraham had, which from our perspective is doubtful. What caused Sarah's death at the age of 127 could be from any number of factors, but lack of faith in the L-rd is, at least to us, unsubstantiated and nowhere near the truth.

Abraham's immediate task after allowing himself a period of mourning was to secure a burial place for Sarah.

In our modern day cemeteries, we are quite used to there being individual plots and groups of such grave sites where families or organizations, such as synagogues, burial societies or other such affinity groups might purchase and maintain places for their members to be buried when the time comes. It was not always that way. Even in America, it was not uncommon for people to section off a certain area of a ranch or a farm where families would bury their loved ones generation after generation; a private cemetery.

Apparently, in the Hebron area in the Land of Canaan, burial was in vogue rather than cremation or burning of the dead. As such, when Abraham approached the local inhabitants, the children of Chais (or Heth), which was more like a tribal reference; they offered him the choice of any of their burial sepulchres.

We ought to stop here for a moment to review the details of how burial using a sepulcher actually worked. The sepulcher was a coffin-shaped stone implement with a stone lid that was used to protect the dead body from being disgraced by stealing it and either burning it or feeding it to wild animals. It also allowed the body to disintegrate naturally over a period of time to where there would be nothing remaining except for the bones. At that point, when all that was left was bones, the bones would be transferred to any of a number of different implements or areas along with the bones of those who had come before. In some instances, the bones were gathered up and then placed in smaller vessels or sepulchres and stored in niches carved into the walls of the structures, vaults or caves that held the main sepulchres. Often, the names of those bones that had been within a sepulcher were carved on the out side or on the lid of the sepulchers so that those who came later would know whose bones were or had been inside. That practice also gave a kind of history of who had died and had been buried, as it were, in this way using that particular sepulcher.

Abraham respectfully rejected the idea of burying Sarah in such a way that would eventually mean that her bones would be co-mingled with those of others who were not believers in the one true G-d. Rather, he identified a very particular piece of property that he obviously knew which was owned by Ephron the son of Zohar, which had on it and within it the cave of Machpelah and which he clearly identified and described the precise location there of and he asked that he be allowed to buy that property at full value.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 6 of 65

From this we can learn that a plan for what to do regarding the need to bury one another must have been discussed by Abraham and Sarah, if not with Isaac as well, and that the particular property identified had been singled out or identified for that purpose by them. It could be, given their advanced ages, which they settled in the area of Hebron in order to be near where they wanted to be buried. That is not discussed in the text of the Torah per se. However, they did live there and they were of advanced years. Why they did not seek to purchase the Cave of Machpelah in advance of the time that they would need it? Clearly, Abraham was not concerned as to the price he might have to pay for it since full value was finally what he did offer when he was faced with the need to bury Sarah and was standing before Ephron.

In these matters, there are no coincidences. Abraham may not have known when he or Sarah was going to die, but he must have put down roots in the neighborhood of the Cave of the Machpelah with a purpose. Then, in purchasing the Cave of the Machpelah he established a permanent connection and clear undeniable rights to the land in question. After the site of the Holy Temple, the Cave of the Machpelah is the holiest site in Judaism. It is the foothold to the claim of ownership of the Land of Israel after the basis established in the very first verse in Genesis, "In the beginning, G-d created ..." which established the L-rd as the creator and ultimate owner of everything in the world and, therefore, free to give any part of it to anyone He pleases.

The Cave of the Machpelah is where, eventually, all three of the Avos (the patriarchs) the founding fathers of Judaism, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and three of the Emos (the Matriarchs) Sarah, Rebecca and Leah were buried. (Rachel was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlathem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.' Genesis 35:19-20 "She gave birth to Benjamin and died.")

The section, Genesis XXIII, ends with a detailed description of the purchase of the Cave of the Machpelah and exactly where it is located so as to clearly identify it as belonging to Abraham and his descendants for ever.

Genesis XXIV

As Genesis XXIV begins, we are provided with an up close and very personal view of two very special and important people; Abraham and his servant Eliezer. The Torah comes very close to identifying the servant as Eliezer but fails to do so at this juncture by name, but Eliezer, which can be translated as "Help of" or Helper of My G-d" who was from Damascus, was the head of Abraham's household as noted in Genesis XV:2 "And Abraham said, 'My L-rd, Hashem/Elokeem: what can you give me seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is the Damascene Eliezer?" Several commentators reason

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

out that the unidentified servant or slave who Abraham tasks with the mission to find and bring back an appropriate wife for his son Isaac, must be Eliezer.

Why the Torah leaves the servant's identity a mystery is in itself a mystery. What would it matter if we knew for certain that it was Eliezer? Does not mentioning who the servant was mean something? And, while we are at it, why does Abraham feel it necessary to have Eliezer (sorry) his servant swear in the matter that he is made to swear; i.e. that he will follow his master's directions exactly, specifically that he will not take Isaac out of the, then, Land of Canaan, and that he will not take a daughter from the Canaanites to be a wife for Isaac. And, further, when pressed regarding the eventuality that the woman selected from Abraham's brethren will not return to Canaan, Abraham states to the servant that indeed if that is the case, then he, the servant, will be released from the oath he will have taken except for the part dealing with not taking Isaac out of the Land of Canaan. (Genesis XXIV:6-8).

One of the commentators reaches back to the last Sedrah dealing with the Akaidah. When Isaac comes "this close" to being slaughtered by his own father and the commentator explains by observing how Abraham and Isaac approached the Akaidah walking together, but after the event they walked away separately. The commentator also observes that from then on Isaac became more cerebral, distant, alone, much different than the other Avos (Fathers). And, Isaac would be the only one of the three Avos (Fathers) to remain the Land that would become the Promised Land, but at that time was the Land of Canaan, for his entire life. Isaac never traveled outside of the Land.

There is also something about the Akaidah that reflects on or has a parallel piece in the Sedrah Chayei Sarah. Abraham, in his charge to his servant (Eliezer) regarding finding a wife for Isaac, tells him that there will be an angel that will come along to help him. See Genesis 24:7. Abraham does not mention the angel that stopped him from completing the killing of Isaac at the Akaidah. How it, the need for need for a sacrifice to the L-rd, was then "discovered" or made known to Abraham, i.e. the sheep that was caught in the bushes. See Genesis 22:13. But, how did Abraham know there would be an angel to help his servant? The Torah does not mention that Abraham had been informed about this. Was Abraham just taking a guess, or hoping out loud about this angel, or did he really know something? And if he did know something, was it learned from his experience at the Akaidah? After all, in Genesis 22:7, when Isaac asks, "Where is the lamb to sacrifice?" Abraham responds, "G-d will provide Himself with the lamb for the burnt offering my son." Genesis 22:8. So, perhaps, even then, Abraham knew the future would include providential input; at the Akaidah a real sheep to be sacrificed in the place of Isaac, and in Abraham's servant's search for a wife for Isaac, one such angel to make sure the right woman is identified, selected and agrees to be brought back to the Land of Canaan to become the next matriarch

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 8 of 65

of the fledgling community of people who were believers in the one true G-d, that was then brand new among the different communities or nations. Or, was it that Abraham was able to reason that there would be no way that the L-rd G-d would allow Isaac, one, to be actually slaughtered, especially by Abraham, and that, two, there would be no way that the L-rd G-d would permit the wrong woman to be provided as a wife of Isaac. The entire story is just too important for such a thing to be allowed to happen without some help or shepherding along the way.

Freedom of choice still existed. Abraham could have ignored the angel who told him to stay his hand when he was about to slaughter Isaac. Similarly, Abraham's servant out of desperation might have picked a woman who Abraham had made him swear not to pick to at least return with someone. But, Abraham had faith that G-d would take care of such important details, while, at the same time, Abraham knew that he, Abraham, himself, had to be an active participant in order to demonstrate his belief in G-d and not merely "talk-the-talk" about it, or just feel inside "a belief in G-d." He had to "walk-the-walk;" to do everything right up until coming "this close" to slaughtering Isaac. And, to keep the covenantal community on track, to do all he could to find a wife for his son Isaac, which at Abraham's advanced years meant enlisting the help of a trusted servant. But, trusted as that servant might be, it would also mean to impress upon that servant the importance of doing right; i.e. not picking the wrong woman for Isaac and not taking Isaac out of the Land. If we think about it, that piece is for the situation that might occur, one never knows, that the search for a wife for Isaac would not have been completed while Abraham and Sarah were still alive.

Clearly, Abraham tried to think and prepare for all eventualities in planning for the continuance of the community of believers in the one true G-d, which he had started. But, he knew no matter how well he prepared to insure a proper and durable succession of leadership from his generation to his son's and onward, it would need the attention and even a certain amount of tweaking; such as the assistance of angels from time to time by the L-rd himself.

So, when Abraham informs his servant in Genesis XXIV Verse 7 that "He (the L-rd G-d) will send His angel before you and you will take a wife for my son from thence," he (Abraham) did so with the surety that comes from knowing that the L-rd was making sure that the promise that He (the L-rd) had made to Abraham, i.e. that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land and would be great in number, would actually come to pass since he had experienced it directly during the Akaidah when G-d sent an angel to hold Abraham back from slaughtering Isaac.

Abraham had done all that he could do and in an honest and straightforward manner that demonstrated to G-d, more importantly to himself, that he believed in the L-rd entirely; unflinchingly. So, what he was explaining to his servant was

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 9 of 65

coming from what to him was proof positive that when one demonstrates one's faith in the L-rd the L-rd will reward such actions with the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham and through Abraham to us, his descendants.

One might ask, when the promise was made to Abraham, i.e. "Lezarahchah ehtain es ha-aretz" "to your seed will I give the land (Genesis XXIV: 7) what exactly did the L-rd mean by "your seed?" The first thing that comes to mind, of course, is the direct descendants of Abraham; i.e. his natural born sons and daughters. But, that would discount all those persons and their descendants who converted to Abraham's covenantal community, which would include his servant Eliezer to whom Abraham was speaking at the time.

Was the word "Lezarachah" "to your seed" indicating something other than a reference to his biological seed? Could it be a symbolic reference to the "offspring" of his having discovered or reasoned out that there is only one true G-d and, in sharing this discovery, as he did, that it was similar to having planted or sowed seeds, which would then grow independently in those people who followed him both in his community during his lifetime and from generation-to-generation in the form of the Jewish People even until today?

The symbolic word "seed" could be referring to both Abraham's children and to those of his covenantal community as well. In that sense, both his biological offspring and his ideological offspring are his descendants.

When one dares to think globally; as if what one is about will have global implications, one would hope that whatever he or she may be doing will receive his or her undivided attention. Nothing will take on more importance than that with which they are involved. We have all gotten so caught up in a project that we worked right through lunch. It is for that reason, actually, that the bride and groom do not eat on the day of their wedding until after the signing of the "Katubah" (the marriage contract) when they retire to a seclusion room and are officially observed by two kosher witnesses who will testify that they were indeed alone and could well have consummated their marriage. But, in fact, the bride and the groom, now that the weighty activity in which they had been involved has been concluded, can break their self-imposed fasting and have something to eat.

It is that kind of complete involvement in one's task at hand that can take one completely out of his or her usual routine. A task of such great importance, such as searching for a bride for his master's son, can cause one to almost completely sublimate one's own identity by allowing his task to consume him almost entirely. Perhaps that is why the Torah does not identify the servant to whom Abraham directs to find a wife for his son Isaac. Knowing who that servant was does not matter. Because no matter whom that servant might have been, he would have been so deeply consumed by his incredibly important objective as to not have

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 10 of 65

had any identity of his own but, rather, to have sacrificed his entire being; mind body and spirit, for the more important objective he would be trying to accomplish.

Given this level of intent on mission of those involved, we might think that everyone would know how high the stakes were and that they could be trusted implicitly to do what was expected of them to realize it. That may have been so, but it did not stop Abraham from codifying what he needed his servant (no matter who that servant might be; Eliezer or otherwise) to do and to focus his servant's entire attention on every element of the mission by insisting that his servant swear an oath that he would do whatever he could do to adhere to the guidelines and observe the restrictions established by Abraham.

The content of that oath was discussed earlier. But the physicalization of the oath deserves some attention and may illuminate things for us as well. Genesis XXIV:2 "... Seem-naw yawdchaw tahchas yeraychee" "And Abraham said unto his servant, the elder of his house, that ruled over all that he had: 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh.'"

Rashi (Shlomo Yitzhaki 1040 – 1105) tells us that because one who takes an oath must hold in his hand a sacred object, such as a scroll of the Torah or phylacteries (Babylonian Talmud Shavoo Os (Oaths):38 and the circumcision was Abraham's first commandment and came to him through suffering and it was beloved to him, and therefore, he chose it (as the object on which to take the oath)."

Following Rashi's logic and knowing that Eliezer or any men who would have been in Abraham's covenantal community would have themselves followed Abraham's lead and have been circumcised as well, so that if the servant was to have sworn while holding something sacred, it would be his own sign of the covenantal agreement that he would have held in his hand.

So, it seems with all due respect that it is more than likely that a different motivational method is indicated by the servant being requested to place his hand under Abraham's thigh.

The late Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr. J.H. Hetz, z"l, (1872 – 1946) is of the opinion that the most likely motivator was fear. "According to the Biblical idiom children are said to issue from the 'thigh' or 'loins' of the father" Genesis XLVI:26). Therefore, the formality of placing the hand upon (or under) the thigh was taken to signify that if the oath were violated, the children who have issued, or might issue, from the 'thigh' would avenge the act of disloyalty."

What can be learned from the oath that Abraham requested his servant take?

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 11 of 65

One is that it is important to clearly establish the objectives of a mission before launching it.

A second is to make certain that those to be involved in the mission have an accurate and complete understanding of the mission's goals and objectives and are aware of and fully committed to honoring the limits of the methods to be used to accomplish those goals and objectives.

Another is to do something to impress upon those who will be working to realize one's goals and objectives just how important the project is and how working on it must be done in such a way as to protect against compromising them in any way.

Whether we hearken to the explanation given by Rashi or by Rabbi Dr. Hertz for why Abraham had his servant place his hand under Abraham's thigh, it is something that is, none the less, important for us to observe and appreciate for what it is and what it accomplishes. Adding some kind of physicalization to an oath made verbally helps both the taker of the oath and those who are observing the taking of the oath know just how serious the taking of that oath is. In court or when taking an oath of office, one is often asked to place one's hand on a bible and to raise his or her right hand. Jewish related oaths often involve the holding or holding on to a Torah scroll, a set of "tefillin" (phylacteries) or other such holy object. When being sworn in to military service, new recruits are required to not merely recite the oath out loud but to take a step forward after they do so which, by doing so, adds finality to the process of taking such an oath. Even agreements concretized in the form of a written document remain merely words until the party or parties involved sign their names or make their marks before witnesses who testify or otherwise notarize the signing they witnessed.

Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. By your deeds will you be known. We could probably come up with another dozen such phrases that help to capture this concept. Is the action for punctuating an oath for everyone else or just for the person taking the oath? It is a good question. It seems it is for both sides of the equation. It concretizes things for all concerned. As the action is performed everything changes. What had been merely spoken of becomes, in that one action packed moment, concrete; etched in stone; real.

The question that does not seem to get asked about this important mission that Abraham recruits his servant to do for him; i.e. to find and bring back a proper wife for his son Isaac, is if the task or mission is so important to Abraham why does he choose to delegate it to someone else instead of doing it himself?

The commentators seem to be more concerned about the details of the oath taken by Abraham's servant than why Abraham delegates this task at all.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 12 of 65

Perhaps commentators see it as a non-issue. After all, Abraham is old at this point and for him to leave home again on what might be a long though very important mission would be ill advised. So, to maximize the chances for his mission to be a success he enlists the help of his trusted servant. In doing so, he does absolutely all he can do to accomplish his goal. His doing so was to serve as a virtual insurance policy that would protect against the possibility that he, Abraham, might die or become physically unable to accomplish the mission and, thereby, leave his son with only the option of taking a wife from amongst the Canaanites; which to Abraham, from what we learn from his absolute insistence against it, would have been absolutely forbidden.

In Genesis XXIV: Verse 9, the servant is described as putting his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swearing according to this matter. In this very simple and straightforward statement the Torah records for us a happening that, in its own way, is as important as the very first verse in the Torah: "In the beginning, G-d created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis I: Verse 1) because in the grand scheme of things, without the continuance of the Jewish People to serve as a light to the other nations of the world, the world would join the previous worlds that had been created and destroyed by G-d for failing to be the world for which He was (is) looking, one where people of free choice to create and enjoy a world full of wonder and joy while helping others who are less able to do the same to enjoy that same world to the best of their abilities.

The Third Alliah of Parshas Chayei Sarah begins at Genesis Chapter XXIV Verse 10, "And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master and departed having all the goodly things of his master's in his hand and he arose and went to Aram-Naharaim unto the city of Nohor." The verse is really more like three verses rolled up into one. Rashi explains that the camels of Abraham were different than other camels in that his wore muzzles so that they could not eat the grasses of other peoples' fields, which could be considered stealing should an owner of camels permit their animals to do such a thing. Rashi also illuminates the meaning of "having all the goodly things of his master's in his hand." He explains that the servant carried with him a "shtar matanah," which is a "deed of gift" written out to Isaac from Abraham for all his possessions, which Abraham hoped would help make his brother more eager to send his daughter to marry Isaac; knowing that Isaac would eventually be a very wealthy man.

There is, perhaps, another observation that can be made while considering this verse; "... having all goodly things of his master's in his hand." It was with his hand under his master, Abraham's, thigh that the servant took a vow concerning his master's dealing with locating and bringing back an appropriate wife for Isaac. It might be seen that the servant's hand thus becomes the symbol of his task and due to the great importance of his mission, as discussed earlier, surely "all goodly things of his master" are now both symbolically and actually in the

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 13 of 65

servant's hand. An unsuccessful result would mean either no wife or, perhaps, an inappropriate wife for Isaac, which would mean the end of the line, literally, for Abraham's nation even before it got started. The success of the servant's mission would mean the taking of the needed next step toward the realization of the covenant made between G-d and Abraham. So, the entirety of G-d's desire for mankind on earth can be seen to be literally and figuratively in the hand of an unnamed servant. It is just as simple as that. And, it is as amazingly important as that. Our "take away" from this way of looking at this might be, again, that everything counts; the covenantal agreement established between G-d and Abraham needs to be continually advanced through our actions today. It is now in our hands to do our part in the same way as Abraham's unidentified servant did.

Abraham's servant's journey to Aram-Naharaim, the city of Nahor, is not described at all in the Torah. We can leave it that nothing significant transpired during that trip. Or, we might see the "non-report" as a way to help us by putting ourselves into the situation and realizing that the trip to Aram-Naharaim for Abraham's servant was, at the very least, arduous. Travel, in those days, was difficult and, often, downright dangerous. It had to have been a journey. But, the "non-report" tells us that the "journey," no matter how severe it may have been, was considered to be nothing, not even worth reporting, compared to the task at hand.

The Torah then proceeds in Genesis XXIV Verses 1 through 67 to give in minute and what might be called amazing detail of what took place when Abraham's servant reached the area outside Aram-Naharaim. And, we learn something from nearly every word of that exposition. Genesis XXIV Verse 1 "And he made the camels kneel down outside the city near the water well at evening time when the women go out to draw water."

Rabbi Dr. Hertz notes that this would be the place in a community where one would go to find information concerning an inhabitant of that local. But, more than that, the servant is placing himself, the fellow travelers in his entourage and his camels in a highly strategic location; i.e. where the women of the community who draw water for their families' needs would come upon his group and, thereby, provide the women with an opportunity to express their natural compassion for others by offering water to him and his group or not.

Abraham's servant had, at that point, done perhaps all he could have done to identify a woman who would be a, if not the, perfect candidate to be a proper and suitable wife for Isaac. The Torah now allows us inside the servant's mind and heart to hear what amounts to the servant's prayer to the L-rd in favor of his master Abraham and for the best possible results for all he knows that is dependant upon the success of his mission. But, he goes much further in his

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 14 of 65

prayer to G-d than one might ever imagine a person would go. In Genesis XXIV Verse 12, he simply asks for a speedy and favorable resolution for his master Abraham. Fine. In Genesis XXIV Verse 13, the servant draws the L-rd's attention as to exactly where he is and that it is the absolute perfect place since it is where all the daughters of the men in the city come to draw water. So, if you were thinking that the servant just happened to end his outbound journey by the watering well, verse 13, is here to tell us it was no accident.

In Genesis XXIV Verse 14 the servant really outdoes himself and perhaps almost anyone who ever asked anything of the L-rd in prayer. The servant puts it all on the line for the L-rd so that if what he asks for comes to pass he will be 100% certain that the woman identified as the one for Isaac will be unmistakably clear. He even goes as far as to recite the dialogue of the scene he hopes will take place and who will do and say what and when and where.

Perhaps we have all been so wrapped up in our thoughts that what is happening seems as if it is a kind of dream that we are thinking will happen and then, we come to, and we see, no, it is not a dream, it is actually happening right there and then; it is real.

Whatever the case may be the Torah reports in Genesis XXIV Verse 15 that even before Abraham's servant had completed his prayer to the L-rd, Rebecca came out, her lineage is presented to us, which makes it clear that she is a candidate and she is carrying her water pitcher on her shoulder. Everything is in order. Rebecca has the right background or lineage and, by carrying her water pitcher, is clearly ready to work. The Torah, at Genesis XXIV Verse 16, adds additional pluses to the growing list of positives: that she is "very fair to look upon" and that she is, as Rashi helps to explain, "pure in every way." Rebecca then proceeds down to the fountain filled her pitcher and came back up (to where the servant and his people and camels were waiting).

To this point, save for positioning himself and those with him in a place where the eligible women in Aram-Naharaim might pass before him, Abraham's servant had not been what might be called "proactive," i.e. he had not said anything or approached any of the women directly. He was there. The young women were there. But, nothing had transpired save for visual observations and personal or individual evaluations and perhaps speculation on his part focused by then, or perhaps exclusively on Rebecca.

Then, in Genesis XXIV Verse 17, everything changes. Abraham's servant does not merely approach Rebecca, he runs to meet her. "Vee Yahrawtz Ha Eved Leekrasaw" "And the servant ran to meet her." Does he introduce himself to this young woman? No. Does he observe any of what might be referred to as common amenities or manners by excusing himself for interrupting her while she

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 15 of 65

was surely laboring while carrying her heavy water pitcher up from the fountain below them? No. He does not. And, to further put the situation into finer focus, what is the nature of a water well or fountain such as the one from which Rebecca had just drawn water to fill her pitcher? It is there as a community resource for anyone to use. We might say it is “first come; first served” except for the fact that there is no service. It is, rather, “every man for himself” with no one expecting to be served by anyone else. So, Abraham’s servant would be welcome to walk down to the well along with his compatriots and their animals and take whatever water they might need.

It would be expected that they would have with them some kind of water receptacles such as pitchers or leather canteens that they could fill and carry up from the well to their group. So, for Abraham’s servant to run over to Rebecca and say, “Give me to drink, I pray thee, a little water from your pitcher” is not what would be called normal. It might even be called rude.

One would expect that the servant, anyone in Abraham’s household would have better manners than to speak and act in such a way as Abraham’s servant did when approaching Rebecca. Surely, he could have had members of his traveling companions carry water up from the well to take care of their needs.

We have to ask, why is Abraham’s servant acting in such an unexpected and even an uncouth way with Rebecca? At the same time, we could ask ourselves why does this beautiful young woman accommodate a complete stranger’s almost demanding and aggressive requests instead of dismissing him out of hand?

The answer offered by the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l, (1903-1993) and alluded to earlier here provides the reason for both sides of the equation. According to the Rav, the “key virtue (that) the members of Abraham’s household possess that made them fit for and worthy of joining the covenantal community was “Chessed” which means “kindness expressed through Hakhnasat orehim” i.e. “hospitality.” The Rav continues to explain “Abraham distinguished himself in this mitzvah. ‘Hakhnasat orehim’ is unique in embodying not only ‘Chessed’ but patience too.”

When Abraham’s servant, who the Rav clearly believes was Eliezer, rushed up to Rebecca and requested that she allow him to drink some water from the pitcher that she had just “schlepped” up from the fountain or water source below – please know that the Rav did not use the word “schlepped” but we do to help emphasize the work that was surely involved in bringing water up from its source for those who need it and to help us all understand and appreciate just what was happening in this very important moment in the history of the Jewish People and, really, in the history of the world – he, the servant, was doing so very much on

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 16 of 65

purpose. He wanted to test Rebecca to learn first hand how she would react to such an ungentlemanly and crass person's request for aid.

The Rav explains in wonderful detail the difference between "genuine kindness" and what he refers to as "civility and courtesy." "A polite person quite often conveys the impression of being charitable and good, but inwardly he is completely indifferent and detached. The act of the polite person is related to etiquette, the act of the kind person to an ethic."

The Rav notes that "the kind person has unlimited patience." That is precisely what Abraham's servant was seeking to find out about Rebecca; was she merely a polite young woman or was she a truly compassionate person who would do whatever she could to help a person in need no matter who that person might be or how lacking in social skills, even in common decency, the needy person might be.

That is why Abraham's servant who, if he is indeed Eliezer, we know to be the very essence of a proper gentleman, dress as best as he can to represent himself as a needy but rough hewn person. Rebecca passes the test with flying colors. She not only gave water to the servant but told him that she would draw water for his camels as well until they were done drinking. (Genesis XXIV Verse 19) The Torah then describes how Rebecca accomplished what she said she would do. She not only drew water for the servant's camels but hastened to do so by running over and over again and again to and from the well until all the servant's camels had been satisfied. (Genesis XXIV Verse 20).

In Genesis XXIV verse 21, we get to see how Abraham's servant handles this special moment while Rebecca works to make sure the stranger's camels are all given sufficient water, which was surely a considerable task when we recall that there were ten camels in the group. We are told that he "looked steadfastly (upon) on her, holding his peace, to know whether the L-rd had made his journey prosperous or not." Rashi helps us by explaining that "Meeshtahai" "Looked steadfastly" is in the sense that the servant was "astonished and confounded" because he could see that his mission was all but accomplished if this lovely young woman of superior compassion was of the correct family lineage.

In his compendium of insights, homilies and interpretations of the weekly Sedrah entitled "Lilmode Ullamed," Rabbi Mordechai Katz (1894 to 1964), 1978, Jep Publications, tells the story of a wealthy Jewish man visiting a town and proposing the marriage of his son and the daughter of the rabbi of the town. The rich man then notices a troubled look on the rabbi's face and inquires. The rabbi tells of a youngster in the town who is dangerously ill and that he is worried about that child. The visitor to the town asks, "But why are you worried about a strange child?" The rabbi, hearing this, decides that his daughter should not marry into

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

this man's family. Anyone coming from a family that shows so little concern for others could not be a desirable match for his (the rabbi's) family. Rabbi Katz shares this story as a reminder that "the quality of 'chesed' and 'concern for others' is something for which we should all search regarding our own families."

Here the Torah is almost as dramatic as a movie director can make it. In Genesis XXIV Verse 22 the focus moves from the camels as they finish drinking the water that Rebecca had drawn from the well and carried up for them to Abraham's servant who, while taking a gold ring and gold bracelets out of where they had been kept, asks, "Whose daughter art thou? Tell me I pray thee. Is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?"

It is almost as if we can hear the servant saying to himself, "This young woman has just got to be the right person. She is perfect." And, even by the way he phrases his questions to the young woman before him, who has just finished what we know to be a great deal of physical labor to have brought water up from the well for ten camels and the men in the group, we can see just how impressed and certain he is that his search had ended.

Rashi notes that the ring weighing half a shekel is like the half shekel each Jew would contribute towards the upkeep of the Temple each year and the bracelets weight of ten shekels stands for the Ten Commandments written on the two stone tablets.

The Baal Haturim, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher, z"l, (circa 1269 – circa 1343) helps us further by noting that the use of this word "BehKah" only occurs twice in the Bible; here and in Exodus XXXVIII: Verse 26 dealing with the half shekel of gold employed as a census device and fundraiser. Here, he alluded to Rebecca that her descendants would gain merit through the shekalim; i.e. the gold coins they would contribute.

Rashi also clarifies the meaning of the word "lawleen" in Genesis XXIV Verse 23, "to lodge in for one night" is what that expression means. When Rebecca replies to the positive a verse or two later she uses the word "lawloon," which indicates a stay or logging for many nights.

Rebecca's reply that she is "the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore unto Nahor" triggers everything that we know today as the history of the Jewish People.

On hearing these words, Abraham's servant is apparently overwhelmed. He communicates now to both Rebecca and to the L-rd at the same time. Clearly, his words and his actions as described are intended for the L-rd but he is doing what he is doing and saying what he is saying in front of Rebecca, who can not

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 18 of 65

ignore what she is observing and hearing. His words of thanks and appreciation to the L-rd are confirmation to Rebecca that what she was first thinking is now confirmed. Let us remember the transformation of Abraham's servant, a complete stranger to Rebecca, comes almost out of nowhere and without any warning.

He comes to her in the middle of her carrying her filled water pitcher and asks, almost demands, water from her to which she complies as only the most caring of people would ever do by taking care of the need for water for his entire party including ten camels. Then, all of a sudden, as her last effort to water the camels is ending, the stranger reveals a new side to his character. He is respectful and interested in not only who she is and who her family is but if they are able to host him and his party for an overnight stay. Her reply is factual but she goes, perhaps, way beyond her "pay grade" being so young and, in the society of the day, a woman, who we would expect would not be empowered or feel free to extend an invitation to total strangers to stay overnight at her family's home. What Rebecca says and how she says it flies in the face of the societal norms of the day and demonstrates her extraordinary hospitality, which is anchored by "chesed" of perhaps the highest order.

Abraham's servant first bows his head and worshiped G-d. "VahYeekod" is from the root word "Kawdahd" to bow or bow the head. Some commentators translate the sentence as "bowed his head and prostrated himself to G-d." It would seem, however, that the last thing that Abraham's servant would want to do is to somehow frighten this young woman he has just identified as the person who is destined to be the matriarch of the covenantal community that Abraham had launched. It is doubtful that he would do anything that would cause the young woman to get nervous such as lying prostrate on the ground and making a big display of thanking G-d. Rather, the Torah is likely reporting how exuberant Abraham's servant was about the successful resolution of his mission to find a proper wife for Isaac and how he verbalized his feelings in what we might term a spontaneous prayer of thanks to the L-rd. It is much more likely that his words directed to the L-rd were completely private; internal; in his thoughts. Perhaps the bowing of the head was the hardly noticeable physicalization of his instantaneous prayer of tribute and thanksgiving. The final part of his prayer could well have been audible: "as for me, the L-rd has led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren." (Genesis XXIV Verse 27). Hearing that last utterance would certainly be enough to motivate Rebecca to run home to tell her family about what happened; which is exactly what transpires in Genesis XXIV Verse 28. "And the damsel ran, and told her mother's house according to these words."

Rashi explains that "it was customary for women to have a house to dwell in during their work; and the daughter (Rebecca) reveals (it) only to her mother;" of

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 19 of 65

what transpired regarding the stranger she met at the water well. Actually, the verse says that she ran and told of “these words.”

To which words is she responding and running home?

The romantics among us might think she was motivated to run home to tell of how she was treated and spoken to by a stranger who took out golden jewelry, which she believes, is intended for her. But, that would be conjecture of the highest order. Rebecca could not pull that out of what she experienced and heard. (Genesis XXIV Verse 26). But, when the stranger motioned his master’s name, Abraham, and then confirmed that he was indeed now about to meet his master’s brethren, this she would have known was big. She had surely heard of Abraham and his having left the fold and knew of his special life style that was so different than hers and of her family’s. But, family is still family. So, when she heard the name “Abraham” and the word “brethren,” she would surely have been motivated to run home to tell her mother.

At Genesis XXIV, Verses 29 and 30, is where what is reported and how things actually came to pass becomes somewhat unclear. We could just read the verses and let the entire scene move past us all in a great rush or we could try to slow things down to hopefully understand and appreciate what was happening and see if we could learn something from that clearer understanding.

Up until now, the Torah does not mention that the servant put the jewelry on Rebecca. The Torah tells us that the servant took it out from wherever he had had it concealed. But, that is all that is mentioned about the jewelry at that point. For the servant to have actually put the jewelry on Rebecca at that point would have been highly irregular. He had no right to even touch Rebecca let alone to bedeck her with jewelry in the way of establishing hers being engaged to marry someone.

That said, we need to understand how, in Genesis XXIV Verse 30, when still referring to Laban, we are told, “And it came to pass, when he saw the ring and the bracelets upon his sister’s hands, and when he heard the words of Rebecca his sister saying, ‘Thus spoke the man unto me,’ that he came unto the man; and behold he stood by the camels and the fountain. This would seem to indicate that, indeed, Abraham’s servant had placed the jewelry described on Rebecca, which would appear to contradict what was stated in Genesis XXIV Verse 22. Or, perhaps it could be taken as a way of clarifying what was reported there.

But, this is far too important to simply assume anything about what happened. The mention of the gold ring and of the two bracelets in Genesis XXIV Verse 22 is reported as having happened by the Torah. We are told the servant took them out but no more of what he did or did not do with them is mentioned. We can

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 20 of 65

surmise that Rebecca saw the ring and the bracelets and that she could deduce from common knowledge what that jewelry was intended to be used to accomplish or to signify. But, when, at Genesis XXIV Verse 30, the Torah tells us of what Laban “saw” regarding the ring and the two bracelets and when he “heard” his sister’s recounting of the details of what happened when she had met the stranger, the Torah is telling us of what Laban “envisioned” but not necessarily of what transpired.

Laban, understanding that the ring and the bracelets that the stranger had revealed were intended to be placed on the appropriate woman’s nose and wrists once the proper arrangements and agreements were made, appreciated their significance and, learning further that the stranger was here representing Abraham and that Abraham was his relative, uncle, and that Rebecca was apparently that woman for whom the jewelry was intended, he placed them on Rebecca’s nose and arms “in his mind’s eye.” Laban heard the story Rebecca had told, saw how everything came together and “ran” to meet this man who represented his father’s brother, his uncle, Abraham, and put himself in front of his family members in order to assume what in his estimation would be the leadership position.

In actuality, his role as leader at this time gets put into its proper place as we see later on in the Sedrah at Genesis XXIV Verse 50 when Laban and Bethuel respond to Abraham’s servant. Rashi notes that the reason Laban is mentioned first in verse 50 is because Laban was a wicked person as exemplified by his responding before his father. But, we could see that coming back at verse 30 when Laban ran out to “greet” the stranger with no respect paid to his father in the matter at that time; as if he, Laban, was in charge. In some ways Laban acts like a precocious little child. But, it is clear that he is not a child and what in a child might be considered cute is anything but cute at his stage of his life.

There are other interesting and helpful details about Laban in particular and about the overall proximity of things and places and people in Aram-Naharaim that have light shed on them in this part of the Torah’s presentation and which are worthy of mentioning at this juncture

“And Rebecca had a brother; and his name was Laban; and Laban ran out unto the man; unto the fountain.” (Genesis XXIV verse 29). This verse may or may not help us understand distances or proximities regarding where the dwelling places of the people who use the water well, particularly Rebecca’s family, were in relationship to the fountain. Since water had to be carried from the well, it would be understandable that people would want their dwelling places to be in close proximity to the well. From this verse, we get the impression that, once inside her house, Rebecca reported that a stranger from the house of Abraham was at the well and that he had spoken to her and inquired as to whether he could stay the

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 21 of 65

night with her family. Just that news alone would have spread quickly though the household. So, even if Rebecca had told her story to the women of the house, to her mother in particular, the men would have been alerted to the news right way. Visitors from family members would surely have been considered very important news.

So, Laban was either selected by someone higher up in the family hierarchy or he “selected” himself to go and greet the “stranger.” If the house or houses of Rebecca’s family were so close to the well that one could step out of the house and be at the well in just a few paces, it might be expected that more than just one person would be sent or would have gone to the well to greet the stranger from Abraham. So, we can reason that there may have been at least some distance between Rebecca’s house and the well. But, the mention that “Rebecca ran to her mother’s house” (Genesis XXIV verse 28) and that “Laban ran out unto the man; unto the fountain” (Genesis XXIV verse 29) indicates that the house or houses of Rebecca’s family were close enough that they could run to and from the well rather than have to walk due to the distance. So, the house might very well have been in “eye shot” of the well. It might even have been in “ear shot” of the well. If it were otherwise, we would expect that others in Rebecca’s family would have accompanied Laban in greeting the man from Abraham. But, apparently, that was not the case.

Additional and perhaps more defining information dealing with the proximity of Rebecca’s family dwelling or dwellings and the water well comes in Genesis XXIV verse 31 when Laban comes face-to-face with Abraham’s servant. Laban encounters Abraham’s servant with anything but formality. In fact, it is almost comedic the way Laban greets his Uncle Abraham’s representative on behalf of his family and, particularly, in light of the extremely important business his counterpart is seeking to conduct with Laban and Laban’s clan. Laban greets this very special visitor as if they had been already introduced; as if they had already been having a warm and friendly discussion: “Come in, thou blessed of the L-rd; wherefore standest thou without?”

We can discuss Laban’s overly friendly style, which might even be taken for outright sarcasm, in a little while. But, for the moment, the proximity question seems to be resolved for us right there. Rebecca ran home. Laban ran from their home to meet Abraham’s servant. But, clearly, they did not have to run far; not far at all apparently. Their home was close enough to the water well that Laban could say to Abraham’s servant, “Come in ... “One can not say, “Come in ...” unless one’s home is very close by; right there really.

We also get to learn some more about the way Rebecca’s family home was structured when, in Genesis XXIV verse 31, Laban continues his “gracious” invitation to Abraham’s servant by explaining “that I have cleared the house and

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

made room for the camels.” Rashi explains that “cleared the house” means that Laban had taken the time to remove things that are related to idol worship from the home knowing that such things would make Abraham’s servant feel uncomfortable. So, at least according to Rashi, Abraham’s “One G-d” belief was known to Rebecca and her family and they were sensitive to what the presence of idols and other similar signs of heathenism would mean to someone who was unindoctrinated to such things. We might be impressed as to how “welcoming” and “gracious” and “hospitable” Laban comes across except that we must remember that Laban’s motivations are based, rather, on his greed since Abraham’s great financial success was also known and Laban was, more than likely, positioning himself to become the recipient of at least some of the valuables that might be forthcoming from Abraham’s servant regarding his sister Rebecca.

Rabbi Doctor Hertz echoes Rashi’s observation by reaching back to Genesis XXIV Verse 30 to note that “When he saw the ring and the bracelets” he was moved to take over dealing with the stranger not to be hospitable but for much more sordid reasons; i.e. monetary self-enrichment.

Genesis XXIV Verse 31 ends with another of Laban’s phrases that gives us more of an appreciation of how Rebecca’s and Laban’s family lived, which may or may not have been typical of others of that time: “and (I) made room for the camels.”

Laban made room for ten camels in their house. What does this mean? We can envision or surmise that their house was more of a compound where there were various structures including a building where the men lived and at least one other where the women lived or at least where they stayed when they were working. And, from what we have learned about Laban’s making room for the ten camels belonging to Abraham’s servant, there may have been a barn-like structure or structures or outdoor areas surrounded by the housing structures which may have formed a protected space where the camels could be safely kept so they could not wander off on their own or be stolen by passers by. However the accommodation may have been for their own animals, Laban’s family’s home had to be of considerable size if, on a moment’s notice Laban was able to “make room” for ten additional camels. Even if Laban was just exaggerating about having “made room,” there must still have been room for quite a few animals to even accept ten camels at all; extra or otherwise.

The invitation by Laban is immediately accepted and, in Genesis XXIV Verse 32, Abraham’s servant enters the house, which we take to mean the “compound” as described above, and the Torah tells us that “he ungirds the camels, and he gives straw and provender (dry food) to the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.” The repeating of the phrase “and he” is what we are to take as the clarifier as to which “he” did what. The first “he”

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

refers to Abraham's servant, who ungirded the camels, by which Rashi points out that what were ungirded on the camels were the muzzles that prevented them from grazing on food that was not theirs; i.e. that did not belong to Abraham. The second "he" refers to Laban, who supplies food for the camels and water for his guest to wash their feet, which was a custom of hospitality in such ancient civilizations and referred to elsewhere in the Bible: Genesis 18: Verse 4, 19: Verse 2, 24: Verse 32, 43: Verse 24 and in the Book of Samuel 25: Verse 41 and others.

What we can learn from this is that washing of feet is not unique to Judaism. Laban and his family, it must be remembered, were related to Abraham but they were not Jewish. Their customs and practices culturally were, more than likely, quite common to those who lived in such climates where it was the norm to wear sandals or no footwear at all when out of doors. The wearing of shoes of any kind indoors was just not done. So, cleaning of one's feet when entering a home or perhaps any structure where people dwelled or spent time for other than outdoor related activities, was universally expected. It was not so much a pleasure to wash one's feet on entering an abode but, rather, a way to insure that the unrefined and harsh outdoor elements were not brought indoors where sitting and lying on the floor, whether on pillows or not, was common and, therefore, not where one would want the tracking in of filth have even a chance of happening.

This may not seem like such an important thing to learn looking back at those times, literally just twenty generations after Adam and Eve, from where we are now in terms of cleanliness, hygiene and providing for ourselves the pleasures of life. But, making a distinct difference between the seamier sides of life and the havens of "purity" and "niceties" that are our homes and private places are, perhaps, the beginning signs of holiness. What, after all, is holiness, but setting something, or some block of time, or some person, or some action we are performing in such a way as to distinguish it or them from the mundane and everyday way we would approach such things or such activities or such people. Keeping one's "home" clean by washing one's feet before entering may be the foreshadowing of what eventually became the way holiness got expressed and demonstrated.

Once Laban is sure that the guests are settled in with their animals taken care of and the men's feet properly cleansed, he sets food before them to eat. (Genesis XXIV Verse 33) But, Abraham's servant demurs and says he will not eat until he speaks of the details of what he is there to accomplish. And, Laban says, "Speak."

The RaDaK (Rabbi David Kimchi 1160 – 1235) observed that Abraham's servant allowed the camels and the other servants who were with him to eat, but he

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

himself would not eat until he completed his mission by securing Rebecca's family's consent for her marriage to Isaac.

When Abraham's servant spoke to Rebecca's family, he wasted no time and he spoke with such a singleness of purpose and in such a way that his words stand out in some ways from almost all others in the Torah. The importance of the servant's mission would make us expect him to have pulled out all the stops and do all that he could to bring about the positive results for which he had been hoping and praying. But, as our rabbis have stated, what was most surprising was not how lengthy and detailed his presentation to Rebecca's family was but that the Torah chose to include every bit of it where, in most instances, the Torah is far more frugal with what it actually chooses to present in terms of numbers of words. In this instance, there was apparently nothing omitted and, therefore, we must know, that every word is important.

In Genesis XXIV Verses 34 through 49 Abraham's servant carefully and methodically presented every bit of information about himself, his master Abraham and all that he did on behalf of his master Abraham to locate and to identify Rebecca as the appropriate wife for his master's son Isaac.

Rabbi Chaim Dov Rabinowitz (1909 – 2001) author of "Da'as Soferim," explains the reasoning behind the servant's plan in how he presented his mission and his experience in searching for an appropriate bride for Abraham's son Isaac and how he eventually found Rebecca. Rabbi Rabinowitz explains that by first associating himself with Abraham, the servant established his own superior credentials as a "G-d fearing man of integrity" for "no one could be a disciple of Abraham without being touched by his greatness and high moral caliber."

To help put what Rabbi Rabinowitz notes for us in perspective; it must be noted further to whom the servant was making his very important presentation. Rebecca's family members were, after all, heathens. That is to say that they were adherents of pagan religious beliefs and practices; were uncivilized and unenlightened. They had no moral code or values and were apt to do anything to others with no regard for what might be referred to as right or wrong.

So, the question as to what the overall effectiveness would be for the servant of Abraham to try and impress such people who have no moral code or value system with the credentials that come by being associated with one such as Abraham, seems to be "Why waste your breath?" But, by the same reasoning that Abraham insisted that the wife for Isaac be chosen from his own relations rather than any of the tribes or peoples around him because he saw, according to the Rav, a better chance for a woman of Chesed, Righteousness, to emanate from that background because he himself came from that background, the servant surely felt if there is any chance to reach the deepest innate humanistic

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

nature of his hosts, it would be if he focused their attentions on Abraham whose own reputation as G-d's ally on earth preceded him and had at least some value and importance even among non-believers such as these; even if that feeling of value or respect came strictly out of fear alone.

We can see where Abraham's servant could make that hopeful leap of faith if we look back for a moment at Genesis XXIV verse 31 where Laban asks the man to enter their home: "Vayomer Bo Bechruach Ado-shem..." which is, "And he said to him come (in) blessed one of G-d..." With that as a clue that Abraham and, by extension, his representative are seen as being very special for whatever reasons non-believers may be impressed as such, the servant of Abraham could go on and make his case and, hopefully, gain their acceptance of his master's request for Rebecca to become the bride of Isaac.

There is what might be considered a side issue here dealing with Laban on which certain commentators take somewhat different, if not opposing, positions at this juncture. Rashi, as we mentioned earlier, sees Laban with the benefit of all that we know about him, which makes him easily seen as a man driven by greed. But, the Ramban (Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194 – circa 1270) sees Laban at this juncture only in terms of what we know of him from these few verses, which is "basically straightforward and honorable" since there really is nothing, up until this point, that would blatantly suggest otherwise.

Our observation leans more towards Rashi's approach in this instance since we see Laban's stepping in front of his elders as less than honorable, as we mentioned earlier, and his focus on the jewelry that had not as yet been placed on his sister Rebecca's person as indicative of his main focus if not his outright obsession with potential financial gain for himself.

Abraham's servant, at Genesis XXIV Verse 35, begins relating his story of how the mission he is on came about and how, at various steps along the way, things clearly indicate Rebecca as the right woman to become the wife of Isaac. He explained how successful his master Abraham had become and credited that great success to G-d having blessed his master so greatly the servant enumerated each category of wealth, which surely impressed his audience, particularly Laban. The servant then gives the lineage of Isaac; who his mother was and that all the wealth and power already mentioned would belong to Isaac, which is enumerated in writing in the paper referred to earlier when, in Genesis XXIV Verse 10, "and the servant took ten camels of his master, and departed; having all goodly things of his master's in his hand..." And Rashi points out that "in his hand" refers to a "deed of gift" from Abraham to Isaac of all his possessions, which he had given to his servant in order that his relatives would be eager to send their daughter to Isaac as his wife.

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

The servant then told of the oath that Abraham made him take regarding who he should bring back as a wife for Isaac and, perhaps as importantly, who he should not. For some reason, the servant did not mention Abraham's warning noted in Genesis XXIV Verse 6, "And Abraham said unto him (the servant); "Beware thou that thou bring not my son back thither." Perhaps it was for the same reason he (the servant) did not make mention of the covenant that the L-rd made with Abraham and that Abraham also made an important part of his "instructions" to the servant in the prelude to the making of the oath, see Genesis XXIV Verse 7, "The L-rd, the G-d of heaven, who took me (Abraham) from my father's house, and from the land of my nativity and who spoke to me, and who swore unto me, saying, 'and thou shalt take a wife for my son from thence."

What Abraham said to his servant was said to impress upon the servant the importance of the mission on which the servant would be embarking. What the servant said to the family of his master's family; i.e. to Abraham's brother Nahor's family, was said to get them to allow Rebecca to leave them and to join Abraham's covenantal community and to become Isaac's wife, which would mean she would become the new matriarch of that community and a, if not the, key link in the perpetuation of that community, as it would develop and become the Jewish People as a nation.

The mention of anything to do with the covenantal community was not made by Abraham's servant to the family of Abraham's brother Nahor. G-d is mentioned, but not G-d's covenant with Abraham. Abraham's having been blessed by G-d with great riches was mentioned in great detail by Abraham's servant but only in so far as its results; i.e. that Abraham was exceedingly wealthy and, one can imagine by extension, very powerful, and that his wealth and power would pass on to Isaac and to his wife upon Abraham's death.

No matter how well off Nahor and his family may have been, apparently it would have paled in comparison to how Abraham had prospered after leaving his family. It must have been part of Abraham's servant's objective to appeal to that aspect of the human psyche the desires to have a sense of control even in the face of always knowing that one is mortal.

Then, to drive home to Nahor and his family the worthiness of his mission on behalf of Abraham and Abraham's son Isaac, the servant, in Genesis XXIV Verse 40, reports what Abraham explained to him when he, the servant, had queried as to what if the woman, when he did identify and locate her, would not follow him to be the wife of Isaac. "And he (Abraham), said unto me, 'The L-rd, before whom I walked, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son from my kindred, and of my father's house."

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

Please let us take just a few moments to focus on an interesting custom that seems to be based on this verse, Genesis XXIV Verse 40. When one learns that someone will be traveling on a significant journey such as overseas or on a cross-country trip, we request that the “traveler” serve as our agent or messenger of our “good deed” or our “mitzvah” and then, when the “traveler” accepts the “mission,” we present them with a sum of money for them to give to a charity or to a needy person on our behalf when they reach their destination. As we learn from the verse, the messenger of a mitzvah is protected by the L-rd. It is then our hope that while our friend or acquaintance is en route back and forth from performing a worthy deed on our behalf that they will be protected in the same way that Abraham’s servant was when on his very important mission to identify and return with a proper wife for Isaac and, thereby, help to insure the continuance of the then new and emerging Jewish People. Perhaps more importantly, if practiced with the best of intentions, this custom can serve to help us understand and appreciate the overarching message of our Sedrah that everything we do counts.

Returning, now, to the Sedrah itself, Nahor and his family, we must again remember, were heathens. They did not believe in G-d as Abraham did. They believed, rather, in various gods (small “g”) for every force of nature that they could not explain or understand and, which kept them in constant fear and awe to where they believed in anything at all that might give them even the smallest amount of confidence. They prayed to objects carved out of wood or stone and believed their prayers would be heard and answered by these inanimate objects.

So, when Abraham’s promise that an angel would accompany his servant to make sure that his mission would be accomplished successfully was disclosed by the servant to Nahor and Nahor’s family, it had to make them think that Abraham was right, particularly in light of how successful Abraham was and that the servant and Abraham had attributed this great success to G-d. To Nahor and his family, everything that the servant had said and represented had to impress them greatly. Coincidence after coincidence to heathens adds up to the conclusion that it must be the will of the gods (small “g”); or, in this case, the will of Abraham’s G-d.

Abraham’s servant includes in his almost moment-by-moment description of how things transpired to bring him to this moment the interchange with regard to what his, the servant’s, responsibility would be if “perchance” the girl would not accompany him back to Abraham’s community. He reports Abraham’s answer in Genesis XXIV Verse 41 “then shalt thou be clear from my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give her not to thee, thou shalt be clear from my oath.”

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 28 of 65

Which is it? Is it “the woman will not come with you?” or is it “if they give her not to thee?” The Torah reported in Genesis XXIV Verse 8 that “Ve eem Lo Sovah HawEeShaw LaLehchas AhCharehChaw ...” “And if the woman be not willing to follow thee...” But, Abraham’s servant feels free to refer to it with the emphasis on listeners when telling his story to Nahor (Abraham’s brother) and his family and not on Rebecca. Genesis XXIV Verse 41 “And if they give her not to thee...”

Before we offer an interpretation as to why the servant makes this change in emphasis from what had been actually said by his master Abraham at the time to how he, the servant, represented it when in front of Nahor and Nahor’s family, Verse 41 needs to be regarded more closely. Verse 41 follows so closely on the heels of Verse 40 that it is almost a part of it. “The L-rd, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father’s house.”

Every word is measured in the servant’s depiction of what transpired in order to produce a certain desired effect.

Text: “And he (Abraham) said unto me...”

Message: What I am about to say is directly from Abraham, which means it is very important.

Text: “The L-rd...”

Message: This is not just about us; you and me; regular people, it is from Him, the L-rd, and is not to be taken lightly or tampered with.

Text: “... before whom I walk ...”

Message: My master, your brother to Nahor or your relative to the others in Nahor’s family, is out in front, is functioning at the very highest level, is under the scrutiny of, and one would clearly imagine, under the protection of the L-rd, and therefore, again, not to be deterred or in any way delayed in his mission, and therefore, by extension in this search for an appropriate wife for Isaac, which similarly must not be delayed, or worse, denied.

Text: “will send His angel with thee ...”

Message: I, the servant of Abraham, am not just here with my compatriots and the camels you see. I am accompanied by an angel, which is an agent of the One and Only G-d who is all-knowing and all-powerful and that angel has the ability to make things happen beyond what might seem is nature’s way; i.e. miraculously.

Text: “And prosper thy way”

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 29 of 65

Message: The journey from the Land of Canaan to the Land of Nahor and back will be safe and free of interruptions and everything that needs to happen to bring about the successful completion of the mission will happen.

Text: “And thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred”

Message: I, Abraham’s servant, am to not merely let things happen but, rather; I am to do what ever may be necessary to locate the appropriate woman, who must be a member of your (Nohar’s) family and make certain that she comes to the Land of Canaan with me to be the wife of my master’s son.

Text: “... and of my father’s house.”

Message: The servant added this bit “and of my father’s house” on his own. It was not mentioned by Abraham neither at Genesis XXIV Verse 4 “But thou shalt go unto my country and to my kindred and take a wife for my son, even for Isaac.” Nor, at Verse 8, “... and thou shalt take a wife for my son from thence.” We must put ourselves in the position of Abraham’s servant. Everything, until this moment, had gone according to Abraham’s predictions. But, what he was facing at this juncture was having to convince Nahor and his family to allow Rebecca to go with him to the Land of Canaan and to become Isaac’s wife. The servant could not know if the angel could do anything to cause this to happen. Nahor and his family had free will to do as they pleased. The servant adds “... and of my father’s house” we would surmise to bring to his listeners’ minds the patriarch of Nahor’s family, Terah, who was both Abraham’s and Nahor’s father. He does so, we believe, in hopes that it would add just the right element to the thinking of his audience to move them closer to allowing Rebecca to leave with him and to become Isaac’s wife.

The servant completes this part of his story by putting the responsibility for the success or failure of his mission squarely on those to whom he is speaking; i.e. Nahor and his family, when, in Genesis XXIV Verse 41, he says, “and thou shalt be clear from my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give her not to thee; thou shalt be clear from my oath.”

By reporting it in this way, the servant of Abraham makes Nahor and his family the pivotal ones with whom Abraham was concerned. But, if we look back at Genesis XXIV Verse 8, what Abraham had actually said was, “And if the woman be not willing to follow thee, then shalt thou be clear from my oath.” The real and only focus was on the woman in question with no regard paid to that of her family.

The servant again edits what his master had actually said in order to create in his audience a higher level of concern and respect than his master Abraham had actually had or at least demonstrated for Nahor and his family. Abraham’s concern was actually about the woman and her possible unwillingness to

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 30 of 65

become the next matriarch of Abraham's covenantal community and not at all about her family's take on the matter.

The servant is again making what he must have felt were minor adjustments to what had actually been said in order to bring about the desired result and not at all out of any kind of negative reason. He was, as we might say, "On the spot" and made as best a presentation as he could and probably thought he was being accurate at the time. Further, we must remember to whom he was speaking; people motivated mainly by fear; people with no true understanding, appreciation or faith in G-d. They were, again, heathens. Perhaps they were the best of the lot of heathens; but, none the less, heathens who think much closer to the way an animal might think than a human being as civilized man understands human beings to be. So, the servant surely felt he must appeal to that very base part of his heathen audience's value system; i.e. "If I don't do this, I could get killed;" and, "This G-d of Abraham seems to be the real deal and takes no prisoners, so let me appease Him now by doing what He asks and hope for the best for myself later."

Having carefully set the scene for what he is about to describe, the servant of Abraham presents the part of his story that focuses more squarely on Rebecca; how he came upon her, what each of them, Rebecca and the servant, said and did, and in the relating of this part of his story, the servant hopes to make clear what Nahor and his family must now do.

How many times have we challenged G-d by putting our fate in His hands so to speak by saying to ourselves something like, "If you (G-d) make thus and such happen then I will do this or that." We are bargaining with the L-rd in one way of thinking, but, in another way of looking at it, we relieve ourselves of the responsibility to do what we need to do to bring about our desired objective and leave it, instead, to what we might refer to as fate, or what we might more honestly call luck.

Abraham's servant had done just about everything he could to position himself to meet or at least come across young women from Nohar's family having placed himself right by the fountain or spring near the Nohar family compound. After all, who else would be coming to the water source than the young women of that household?

His prayer, which comes in the way of a challenge to G-d is to have "Miss Right" demonstrate, as we mentioned earlier, "chesed" (righteousness) of the highest order. In Genesis XXIV Verses 42 through 48, he expounds upon the details of his challenge to G-d and just how things played out. He does not mention "chesed" as such, but he does describe it in the kinds of actions and words he asks that "Miss Right" will display. He uses a word in Verse 43, "HawAIMaw," that

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

means a maiden of marriageable age, which is different than what the Torah had reported he had said in his “challenge” to the L-rd, when he referred to “HaNaHaRaw” the damsel, which describes or means a young woman but not necessarily of marriageable age. We might want to get a better feel for why the servant would have even thought in that way about a woman who was to be the wife of Isaac. Why would he have a “damsel” in mind when it was a woman of marriageable age for whom he would have been searching?

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michael Weiser 1809 – 1879) explains the nuanced difference between the word used by the servant to describe Rebecca after he met her, “HawAlMaw,” which he explains has a more specific meaning than others may define it. It denotes a young woman in the vigor of her youth. The Torah, back in Genesis XXIV Verse 16, had referred to Rebecca as “NaHaRaw,” which is damsel or maiden. The Malbim explains that a woman in the category of “AlMaw” would mean she had passed a very exacting test in the eyes of Abraham’s servant. And, more than that, a woman who is considered an “AlMaw” would normally not be one who would go down to a well to carry water. Such a woman would leave these kinds of tasks to others. But, in the case of Rebecca, the servant was describing and witnessing a very special woman, who rises far above even the normal definition or understanding of the term “AlMaw” because of her sincere desire to help others, which, according to The Malbim, further indicates that Divine Providence was involved in this particular woman being at this particular place, at this particular time and doing what she apparently always does; i.e. all she could do to ease the burden of others, even of complete strangers, by, in this instance, drawing water for them; the servant and his entourage. To The Malbim, this is evidence of the highest order that Rebecca was the woman the servant had been sent to find for his master’s son Isaac; the woman who would be the next matriarch and help advance Abraham’s and the L-rd’s covenantal community toward its next stage.

The Torah continues to report what Abraham’s servant said and how he said it to Nahor and Nahor’s family almost as if it was being read back from the transcript on the notes that were taken by someone at the time of the meeting between Rebecca and Abraham’s servant. But, at this juncture, Genesis XXIV Verse 47, the “transcript” is of what the servant said and not necessarily of what actually transpired at the time of his meeting Rebecca. That may seem contradictory but, as noted earlier in several instances, the servant took liberties in speaking to Nohar and Nohar’s family and skated away from the way things actually took place in favor of hoping what he was saying would work to motivate his listeners appropriately.

At Genesis XXIV Verse 47 the servant tells of how, after Rebecca had done all of the hard work of carrying water from the well over and over in her pitcher to satisfy the needs of the servant himself, the men who were with him and the ten

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 32 of 65

camels they had brought, that he asked about her lineage, “Whose daughter art thou?” And, then, after learning that she was Nahor’s granddaughter, and, therefore, from the family of Abraham’s brother, that he knew, without a doubt, that this young woman was the woman for whom he had been searching and, he reported, that he “put the ring upon her nose and the bracelets upon her hands.”

Now, almost everyone amongst the commentators points out, as Rabbi Dr. Hertz does, that back at Genesis XXIV Verse 22 “he had given her the presents before (the underlining is ours) asking who she was.” So that means that the servant’s statement here at Genesis XXIV Verse 47 actually switched things around.

But, when we look at Verse 22 and what it actually says without allowing ourselves to read anything “into” it, we notice something else: “and it was when the camels had finished drinking that the man took out a golden nose ring that weighed a half shekel and two bracelets for her arms (or hands) of ten shekel weights of gold.” Verse 23 goes on to report that the servant asked “whose daughter art thou?” and if there is room in her father’s house for them (the servant and his party) to lodge over night.

Notice: There is no clear statement in Verse 22 that the servant placed the nose ring on Rebecca’s nose. Similarly, the verse indicates that the bracelets were for her arms but it does not say that he actually put the bracelets on Rebecca’s arms. In Verse 47, the servant finishes his statement where he had put his question about Rebecca’s lineage first, before taking out the nose ring and bracelets, and declares that he then placed the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms; just as straightforward as could be; as if he had actually done it.

Frankly, it would be much easier for us to believe that the servant had put the nose ring and bracelets on Rebecca as he states in Verse 47. It would take almost no convincing at all to go back to Verse 22 and allow what is an otherwise non sequitur regarding the taking out of the nose ring and the two arm bracelets by the servant a confirmation that he did put them on Rebecca’s nose and arms. But, during his speech to Nahor and Nahor’s family, the servant of Abraham had on several occasions said things that were either not as they actually happened as reported to us by the Torah or that had not happened at all.

So, even though it would be easier to just go with the flow of the servant’s statement to Nahor and Nahor’s family that he put the nose ring and the arm bracelets on Rebecca, let us at least first investigate what was being said by the servant in Verse 47 by his stating that he had put the jewelry on Rebecca when, according the simple and unadorned reading of Verse 22 he had not done so.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 33 of 65

The whole thing comes down to whether Rebecca was wearing the jewelry items or not. If not, then how and why would the servant have stated he had put them on her when he had not?

The Torah is not performing a slight of hand magic trick here either. Today, we might go to the video tape so to speak and look at the video evidence. The video would show that the servant puts the jewelry on her or he does not. Rebecca would be wearing the jewelry or she would not be wearing it. Case closed.

Without such evidence, we only have the words in the Torah and our willingness to gain as complete an understanding of what the people living so long ago were really going through, what they were feeling and what we could determine they actually did.

If you can imagine that Abraham's servant would have actually dared to place a nose ring and arm bracelets that were surely symbols of engagement of marriage commitment on the nose and arms of a young woman who he had just met near her family's watering hole and across the way from her family's compound, then stop reading now.

Showing Rebecca jewelry symbolizing engagement of marriage commitment which we do know that he did since the Torah mentions his having taken it out, would have been understood by her for what it was. That was followed by his audible thanks to the L-rd for bringing him to this place, his master's family, and for helping him accomplish his mission. That mention of his relationship to her family was what we can be sure catapulted her into running to her home to tell her mother of the news. Was she wearing the jewelry? It does not seem likely that she was. But, she seemed to know about it. She would know we put these pieces that it meant and, strengthened by the stranger's other questions regarding her lineage and whether her family could accommodate an overnight stay of the stranger and his companions, she may have put two and two together and saw that she herself was being considered as the object of the visitor's mission, which involved her becoming the bride of someone in her great-uncle Abraham's family. That we can surmise is what happened and what was going on in Rebecca's mind when she ran home to tell her family about it.

If that was indeed what happened, then why would the servant have told Nahor and Nahor's family that he had placed the nose ring on Rebecca's nose and the bracelets on her arms when he really had not done so? It is that question and the apparent logical incongruity that allows most everyone to opt for taking Verse 22 to mean that he put these pieces of highly symbolic jewelry on Rebecca. Then, everything works. Then, the only incongruity is having to accept that a man would dare to do such a thing to a young girl, a complete stranger, with downside risks for having done so that could be catastrophic even if the "gifts" were gold and of considerable value.

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 34 of 65

Let us please look back at the text to see what, if anything, is there for us but which has somehow been avoiding our gaze. Verse 47 says: "And I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter art thou?' And she said, "The daughter of Bethuel Nahor's son whom Milcah bore unto him. And I put the ring upon her nose and the bracelets on her hands."

Rabbi Dr. Hertz notes that, "In point of fact he had given her the presents before asking who she was; see Verse 22 i.e. "and that is so except at Verse 22 it just says, "... the man took (out) a golden ring of half shekel weight and two bracelets for her arms of ten shekel weight of gold." Then, in Verse 23 he asks her who her parents are. Rabbi Dr. Hertz helps us by showing the reversal regarding the order of what topics were covered by the servant and in what order. In Verse 22 it was ring and bracelets taken out first and then asking her about her parents. That is what did happen since that is what was reported to us by the Torah. And that makes sense and feels right. The servant is nearly convinced that this is the right woman so he takes the symbolic jewelry gifts out almost as a way for him to reinforce in his mind through that physical action alone that this is about to be the moment he had been hoping and praying would take place. But, before knowing her lineage, he would not have given Rebecca the symbolic jewelry. And, in point of fact, after he finds out that she is of Nahor's family, no mention of the jewelry is made until Verse 47 in the telling of the tale and the "selling" of the idea that Rebecca should be allowed to marry Isaac by the servant to Nahor and Nahor's family.

It seems that we must forgive Abraham's servant for another in a series of inconsistencies in his reporting, his telling and his selling, if you will, before Nahor and Nahor's family while conducting this most urgent and crucial of missions on which he had been sent. His overwhelming enthusiasm for the successful resolution of his mission seems to have made him do what effective sales persons have done since time immemorial. He assumed the sale; i.e. he convinced himself that what he was asking Nahor and Nahor's family to do regarding Rebecca would be completely and enthusiastically accepted by them. In his enthusiasm to bring about the successful conclusion of this presentation, he touched all the bases he thought would help him in his cause and he did it as the remembrances of what had taken place when he had met and interacted with Rebecca came to his mind. His shifting of the timeline was surely not done purposely. Nobody is that good. And, similarly, his remembrance of his desire to place the symbolic marriage jewelry on Rebecca came to him as a fait accompli than as a thought that would have to be acted upon later when the time was right; after her family had been approached and had accepted the request and granted her hand in marriage to Isaac.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 35 of 65

The symbolic jewelry by then was on the table both symbolically and actually. When it got placed on Rebecca would be inconsequential once the permission for the marriage had been granted. But, to have actually placed the symbolic marriage jewelry on Rebecca before the proper steps had been taken is neigh onto impossible to conceive unless we get caught up in the dynamics and perhaps desperate salesmanship of Abraham's servant as he makes his case in order to preserve the fledgling Holy and covenantal community his master Abraham and the L-rd had launched together.

If one wishes to believe that the symbolic marriage jewelry was actually placed on Rebecca back at Verse 22, we can only say, "Join the crowd." because that interpretation is and has been the accepted way to look at the incident. But, we suggest that when looked at as we have just done above, the human frailty of Abraham's servant permeates the entire story so pervasively that to ignore it and to ignore what would have been socially acceptable back then and what would not have been is to discount truth in favor of heroic actions that would never have been dared to have been done by Abraham's servant for fear of endangering the positive outcome of his mission; never.

It is much simpler to go with the mainstream approach to this subject and with the Torah itself in general, but the people in the Torah were real people who had all the foibles and fears that any of us has today; perhaps more so. Nahor and his family were different than the average people we would know today in that he and his family were heathens. It is easier to write and say that than it is to comprehend or to accept it. We tend to see people as the same as we are until proven otherwise. We give people the benefit of the doubt. We expect that people live under and act according to basic values; that human life is precious and is a key part of those values. That was not the case among heathens. And, in the time of Abraham, heathens were the majority of those on this planet. Except for Abraham and his small covenantal community, everyone else was a heathen. Human life meant far less than we can imagine; except, perhaps, if one looks at the news articles about people who kill their babies, or their family members, or who murder or assassinate people for religious reasons or political reasons and we say, "They must be crazy; sick; mentally ill." But, we find it difficult to call them barbarians and certainly not an antiquated term such as "heathens."

We, today, want to be "fair." But, Abraham's servant knew better than that. He lived among heathens and could never forget it. For him to approach these people, even if they were so closely related to his master, Abraham, who, it can be argued, was the first "civilized" person and from who would follow all those who would become civilization as we know it today, would mean he would have to be extremely careful so as not to somehow cause them to turn on him, which, if it did happen, could be fatal, but, even worse, would mean he would not bring

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 36 of 65

his mission to find a proper bride for Isaac back to the Land of Canaan. Maintaining his focus on his all important objective would have been uppermost on his mind even in light of how unpredictable and potentially dangerous those with whom he was dealing might be. With that in mind, one can see where Abraham's servant was walking a thin line and was apt to say nearly anything that he felt would convince his heathen audience to grant his request regarding Rebecca.

The servant then, in Genesis XXIV Verse 48, describes how he prayed and blessed G-d for guiding him on a "true path" to find this most appropriate woman. What he left out is how he blessed G-d; i.e. "Who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master ..." and, again, what he changed from what he had actually said regarding to his being guided here. He had said, "As for me, the L-rd has led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren." But, in his words to Nahor he altered it to, "and blessed the L-rd, G-d of my master Abraham, who had led me the right way to take my master's brother's daughter for his son." My master's brother's daughter? It should have read, "My master's brother's granddaughter" or "My master's brother's son's daughter." If he was going to change it in retrospect, why not change it correctly?

Was the servant being kind to Nahor by referring to Rebecca as his daughter and not as his granddaughter? Was he trying to "lighten things up" a little by using some humor? We can only guess. It surely was not meant as a "dig" or a slight aimed at Bethuel, who was Rebecca's father and Nahor's son. There would be nothing to be gained by doing something to insult some one. Nahor was surely the decision maker here and the servant knew where his bread would be buttered; i.e. who would be saying "Yea" or "Nay" to his request. Or, in the same way we often refer to Abraham's offspring, no matter how many generations removed, as his "children," the servant could simply have been referring to Rebecca as Nahor's daughter.

Abraham's servant is now ready, as a professional in sales might be in a selling situation, to "ask for the order." In Genesis XXIV Verse 49, the servant, at long last, broaches the subject by asking Nahor to allow Rebecca to become Isaac's wife. But, the servant does so in a most circuitous way; carefully, perhaps, even diplomatically. He clearly wants to leave the door open in case the response he gets is, in deed, negative. To make sure he can retake the pursuit of his objective he poses his question so as not to solicit a yes or no answer.

All of the servant's careful concern not to ruffle the feathers of Nahor and Nahor's family comes into even sharper focus when the servant finally rests his case and goes quiet to await Nahor's response. What makes us see so clearly what Abraham's servant was up against when he was making his presentation to Nahor was not so much what is said but, rather, who says it. It was who spoke on

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

behalf of Rebecca and her family that is so revealing about the members of Nahor's family and even of Nahor himself.

In Genesis XXIV Verse 50, we are told that Laban and Bethuel answer, "The thing proceedeth from the Lord; we can not speak unto thee bad or good."

Rashi and other commentators point out how the Torah mentions Laban before Bethuel, his father, which is the Torah's way of alerting us to just how much of an evil person Laban really was. Such an insult; speaking before one's father.

But, what we can see in the available response, which man said which words is not discussed. Can we entertain for even an instant that when the Torah says "Laban and Bethuel answered" that they responded to Abraham's servant together, in one voice? Surely, we can not. But, that being the case, we must still ask did Laban say the first part of Verse 50 and then Bethuel followed up with the second part of that verse, or, was Verse 50 spoken by Laban in its entirety and, then, did Bethuel speak the words set down in Verse 51?

The later scenario appears to be what the Torah is describing and, though it may not matter which way it really happened, it still might be illuminating to investigate both possibilities.

Remembering that Laban is Bethuel's son and, at the same time, the old maxim "Like father like son" we can see that maxim being acted out almost perfectly if we picture Laban bursting forth in front of his father, with no regard to his father's position as the father of Rebecca, and giving his own response, which in itself is interesting and is perhaps further indicative of his pension for the nefarious. "The thing proceedeth from G-d; we can not say it is good or bad." which is to say, "I am not responsible. It is out of my hands. Keeping Rebecca with us or allowing her to go with you to become our cousin's wife may have an effect on me and it may not, but in either case, it does not seem that it will make a difference in my life." To Laban, everything is about Laban. So, if that is the case, why does Laban even participate in the dialogue with Abraham's servant? Why did he sit still for the servant's presentation? Why does he offer his take on the matter here at all?

If Laban were perhaps an eight year old, we might say that the boy is impetuous. But, at his age, surely in his teens or above having a sister of marriageable age, youthful impetuosity has solidified into blatant disregard for rank and authority. He acts like an untrained animal. Nothing matters to him except what he wants and when he wants it. Being in the forefront seems to be his nature. Establishing himself as the "leader of the pack" in front of this agent of a rich long-lost relative may have self-enriching consequences if recompense is paid for "his" allowing Rebecca to become Isaac's wife. So, thrusting himself out in

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 38 of 65

front of his own father and saying anything at all, fits the mold of the person that is Laban.

Then, Bethuel, in Verse 51, who says, “Behold Rebecca is before thee; take her and go and let her be thy master’s son’s wife as the L-rd hath spoken.” From his words, we can see he knows his son Laban and understands him. Bethuel’s focus is more on the here-and-now; the business at hand; for him there is no beating around the bush. He lets the servant know where he stands immediately and with no hidden agenda. It would be for Bethuel to say these words since he is Rebecca’s father.

The Ramban (Rabbenu Moshe ben Maimon; also called Rabbi Moses Maimonides, 1135 – 1204) notes that no where in the Sedrah does the Torah mention that the L-rd said that Rebecca was the right woman for Isaac. However, according to the Ramban, G-d “speaks” through His control of the events and the entire sequence of the narrative shows that He wanted Rebecca to become Isaac’s wife. Verse 51 seems to corroborate the Ramban’s point.

The way the servant treated and was so very respectful of Nahor flies in the face of how Nahor’s own son and grandson treated him by responding to the servant’s request for Rebecca’s hand with no regard to the family patriarch; Nahor. When we now look back at how Laban and Bethuel spoke as they did, it should be noted that in such extended families, such as the way Nahor and his family lived, it would be the patriarch and the matriarch who would either have a say in who marries who or at least be acknowledged with some kind of courtesy extended or tribute paid by his son or grandson. That is not the case here. So, neither Nahor nor Abraham is mentioned by Laban and Bethuel. That takes rudeness to anew height even for heathens. Or, is this entire exchange pointing to part of what we are to take away from this Sedrah?

Perhaps it is. Something as seemingly minor as paying respect to one’s elders or not can tell us a lot about the person or persons with whom we may be dealing. Abraham’s servant seems to have been well acquainted with heathen ways. He must have been one himself before having converted to Abraham’s covenantal community. His presentation regarding Rebecca now seems even more revealing as to how and why he chose his words and presented his case. In observing the interpersonal dynamics of Nahor and his family we are able to see where each of us stands today when we come up against situations where crucial life related values hang in the balance and may depend on whether our opposite numbers either cherish and appreciate life as much as we do, or if they are leaning more to what might be their heathen nature where life and human decency to them means nothing.

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

Abraham's servant finally heard the permission he had hoped to receive to take Rebecca to the Land of Canaan so that she could become the wife of Isaac. His reaction was at first very personal and then as celebratory and as grandiose as it could be towards his master's relatives. Though some translate Genesis XXIV Verse 52 in such away as to picture the servant prostrating himself on the ground as he gave thanks to the L-rd, a less "dramatic" way of acknowledgement to the L-rd is suggested by others. Rashi, in Braishes Rabah 58:6, says "Yeshtachu" simply means "he thanked" rather than "he bowed." This is also the way Targum Yonasan ben Uzziel (Rabbi Yonatan ben Uzziel lived about 2000 years ago and was the greatest student of Hillel) understanding of it was as in II Samuel 64 Verse 4 where Heestahchavaisee is related as more akin to "Modainaw" which is "I give thanks" rather than "Sawgeednaw" which is "I bow."

Verse 52 actually helps us appreciate that this thanks to the L-rd was more modest than big and dramatic since the phrase that tells us of the "thanks" includes the word "Artsaw," which is from the word "Ehretz," which means "land." The vowel vocalization called "Kawmatz" which is the symbol under the next to the last letter of the word "Artsaw" and followed by the letter "Hey" is what our Chumash (Bible) teacher Rabbi Morris Besdin, z"l, (1913 – 1982) referred to as the "Brooklyn Hey." It would turn any word meaning a place into that place name preceded by the word "towards." So, Brooklyn would become "Brooklynaw" and would mean "towards Brooklyn." So, in this instance, the Torah, by adding Rabbi Besdin's "Brooklyn Hey" to the word "Eretz" and yielding the word "Artzaw" tells us that the servant did not prostrate himself on the ground, but, rather bowed or gazed by as little an action of dipping his head or gazing towards the ground, i.e. "towards the earth" courtesy of the Brooklyn Hey. But, before we leave Rabbi Besdin's Brooklyn Hey, let us offer for consideration that when the servant was gazing "Artzaw" he was not gazing down "to the earth" but, rather, "towards the land." As my wife Andrea Bigelisen Kopf observed, the "land" in this instance might well mean back where Abraham and his covenantal community was; i.e. the Land of Canaan, which we would later refer to as the Land of Israel. Just as today it is common to refer to the Land of Israel as "Aretz" which translates as "the Land" as an affectionate and shorter way to refer to the Land of Israel it could very well have been what the Torah was telling us about the servant and how he was thankful to the L-rd and, therefore, gazed toward the Land of Canaan, where Abraham and his covenantal community was located: "Artzaw" - with Rabbi Besdin's "Brooklyn Hey" – towards not just the earth or down but toward the "Land" of what would eventually be Israel, the Promised Land.

And, there is yet something else that takes place in Verse 52 that deserves our attention as well. The verse begins, "Vah Yehee Kah-asher Shawmah Eved Avraham" which is "and it came to pass that Abraham's servant..." Though earlier in the Sedrah, at Genesis XXIV Verse 34, the servant refers to himself in this way, according to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh, z"l, (1808 – 1888) "this is

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

the first time in the chapter that the Torah gives him this august title. Once he had proven his loyalty and accomplished his mission, G-d refers to him as a servant of his beloved patriarch.”

There may be a tendency for those who read or study the Torah to make more of things they encounter in it than the Torah intended for such things itself. The way Abraham’s servant expresses his thanks to G-d in this instance may well be a good example of this tendency. The servant “thanked G-d” gets turned into “the servant throws himself down on to the ground prostrate” when, more than likely, the thanks he had given was just the slightest little private moment that was probably not even noticeable to others around him. What causes people to embellish or hyper-interpret things in the Torah in this way?

First, we need to realize it is not the Torah doing it to itself. The responsibility belongs entirely to those reading the Torah and then reading things into it. In our opinion, it comes from a combination of factors: one is that we are so far away from the situation being described in the Torah. A second is the style of presentation used in the Torah. The Torah gives us a certain amount of detail in terms of the local and the environment in which the participants were living at the time. The Torah also gives us the dialogue; i.e. the words that were spoken and by whom they were spoken. What is left for us to do when reading the Torah is to “put it on its feet” by which we mean to gain an in depth understanding of the way each situation related by the Torah actually occurred.

LeHavdeel in Hebrew means “to make a distinction” or, when referring to things of a Biblical nature, it is used to express the idea that what we are about to offer as a way to understand or appreciate something in or about the Torah is ultimately and wholly different than the Torah itself and not to be taken as more than it is or in any way to set a limit on or to compare it to the Torah. The following is offered under the stipulation just described; i.e. LeHavdeel.

A director of a theatrical presentation such as play, a musical or an opera is provided with the author’s script, which contains the words that are to be spoken or sung by the actors and or the singers. The author may also provide a certain amount of what are referred to as “stage directions” that inform the actors and the directors of productions when the actors are to enter and leave the stage and when certain specific actions are to take place.

Example: “Hamlet” Act III Scene IV- [Enter Queen Margret and Polonius] and later [Polonius hides behind the arras].

But, there is only so much that Shakespeare can provide in his stage directions. The remainder of the life that is to be represented on stage must be provided by the actors with the help of the director who try to fill in the myriad of moment-by-

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

moment actions that will hopefully create what will appear to be “reality” for the audiences who see the production. Of course, the audience is always aware that the play they are watching is just that, a play. It is not “reality” that the actors are acting out. It is a representation of what the reality was or might have been.

The Torah does not provide us with actors or directors to help us fill in the blanks left for us by the text. The further and further away we get from when the Torah was written, the more difficult it becomes for us to understand definitively what the “stage directions” provided for us by the Torah meant to readers at that time and from what they might mean to us today.

When we suggested to an acquaintance, who was an adult new to reading for pleasure, that she try reading plays, the thought of having to fill in the blanks that are provided for in novels and short stories and the like by their authors, caused her to reject the idea out of hand. Clearly, the thought process that would be involved in constructing or reconstructing the missing details was far too much of a requirement for her to even want to attempt. Until she had started reading for pleasure, reading for her was work. And, why would anyone want to work so hard when she could watch a film or a television program and have all the work that goes into creating the reality of a story done for her?

For some reason, this reminds us of little children who, when we read a story to them, will say as soon as the story is done, “Again daddy!” There is something very comforting to them in hearing the same story read or told to them over and over again. They know what is coming at every twist and turn the story might have and the ending, particularly if it is “... and they lived happily ever after. The End,” can be very comforting and reassuring that they are also going to be safe and sound and live “happily ever after” as well.

This way of reading, without “putting it on its feet,” makes reading the Torah very difficult. One depends almost entirely the translation one has at one’s disposal and on who is interpreting the text for the reader.

This brings to mind in a similar way a certain rise in the road in upstate New York. When we would drive over that rise in the road, the car would lift up with a kind of rollercoaster type abruptness and then, while we were seemingly aloft, the kids would cry out in a kind of ecstasy, “Weeeee!” until we would come down off the rise and back to the regular flat and even roadway. That section of the roadway became known as “The Weeeees.” It happened every time and no matter how slowly we would approach that area that “rollercoaster” feeling still occurred to some extent. The kids always loved and looked forward to it.

There is a section of road on the southbound side of the West Side Highway in New York City approaching the 95th Street Exit that creates a similar “Weeeees”

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 42 of 65

effect. Even with no kids around, the feeling is still there. What makes it feel the way it does? What makes a section of road like that so much fun? There is a certain amount of fear when we drive over the rise in the pavement that makes us feel like we are out of control; at risk; in danger. Then, when the car comes back to the regular and even roadway, the fear of danger abates and that relief is celebrated by joy. We wrote about this in much greater detail in the Sedrah of Schlach Lecha "The Ride of a Life Time."

(see: <http://www.echelonartgallery.com/artists/dgk/paintings/jewish/37-shlach-lecha/shlach-lecha.html>)

The same kind comfort that children enjoy from hearing the same happy ending over and over is what we also get from tempting fate and coming out safe and sound. No real risks involved. No real danger. Everything being done for us. Fun. Certainly. But, what do we get out of it besides entertainment? Not much if anything at all.

Each of us comes to the Torah from our own unique point of view and perspective. If we read the words and use current day perceptions of what those words mean without an appreciation of what the words meant to people when those words were first transcribed and without an accurate understanding of what life was like for the people who first received the Torah and, more to the point, of what life was like for those being discussed in the Torah so we will be getting a far different understanding of what really had happened. The down side is that what one might learn from the Torah for one's own self betterment might well be missed, which would be too bad in deed.

Genesis XXIV Verse 53 could just take us to the next step along the way of securing the new matriarch for Abraham's covenantal community, but it is just not so simple. It reads: "And the servant brought forth implements or jewels of silver and implements or jewels of gold and clothing (or a raiment) and gave them to Rebecca and 'Meegahnos,' precious things or delicious fruit he gave to her brother and her mother."

This verse is easy to approach at first but it gets more and more problematic as we consider it further. The word "Klay" comes from the word "Klee," which means "utensil, instrument or tool and, in this form, means "Kaleem shell" or "Klay," which is "instruments of" silver and instruments of gold in this verse. It does not necessarily mean jewelry items. But, they could have been items that were for personal grooming like combs or brushes or clips or chains that might tie up one's hair or be worn as decoration. When things of considerable value were given to a woman on behalf of a man, which was the case in this instance with Abraham's servant acting as agent of Isaac, such valuables would have taken the place of the ring in today's Jewish wedding ceremony and would have served

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 43 of 65

as a way of consummating the marriage between Rebecca and Isaac; even if it was “long distance.”

The valuables given by the servant to Rebecca’s brother and mother are referred to by Rabbi Dr. Hertz as the “Mohar,” which was a kind of payment to them for the loss of Rebecca’s services to them. It is on the order of a bridal payment or purchase price of a wife and some call it a dowry. This is noted by Tobiah ben Eliezer, a Talmudist and poet of the 11th century and reported to have been one of Rashi’s teachers, whose work “Lekach Tov” is often the nick name by which he is called.

But where is Bethuel, the father of Rebecca, at this juncture? The Torah does not mention him as receiving any kind of gift marking his daughter’s marriage. Rashi explains that the gifts that were given to Rebecca’s brother and mother were delicious fruits that he had carried with from the Land of Cannan. Rashi also brings a Midrash (a legend) about what happened to Bethuel. The Midrash says that the family expected extravagant gifts from the servant. Disappointed that he had given them only fruit, Bethuel tried to renege on his agreement to allow the marriage or, worse, he tried to poison the servant. So, the L-rd sent an angel to kill Bethuel, which is why Rashi says Bethuel is not mentioned at this juncture in the telling of what happened.

Bethuel is certainly not mentioned. The Midrash is a legend that may or may not be valid. One can surmise any number of reasons for Bethuel not to have been mentioned at this juncture. He was a hethen after all. He may well have been capable of murder for such a disappointment.

But, the translation of “Migdawnos” does not really seem to indicate things that were eatable, such as fruits, even if they were from the Land of Cannan. There is a similar word with a masculine gender, “Meegawdeem,” from the word “Mehged,” which means excellence, a choice thing, something delicious or sweet. Where “Migdawnos” from the word “Meegdan” which could be apparently either feminine or masculine, and means, more simply, a gift or a precious thing; with no reference to fruit or sweet or anything eatable. So, these things that were given to Rebecca’s family may not have been on the order of jewelry made of precious metals like gold or silver, but would have been none the less precious gifts of some kind.

Genesis XXIV Verse 54 puts a kind of coda or ending on the servant’s all important presentation before Nahor and his family, which was in essence a do or die moment where failure was not an option and because of the signing of the wedding contract between or on behalf of Rebecca and Isaac. “And they ate and they drank; he and his men who were with him.” This verse needs to be compared with what we were told in Genesis XXIV Verse 33 when the servant

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

said in response to food having been set before him to eat, "I will not eat until I have spoken my words." At Verse 33, waiting to eat was about servant himself. But, at Verse 54 we learn that the men who were with him apparently also refrained from indulging in the meal set before them until after the servant had concluded his presentation.

No big deal perhaps; but, still, actions, as they say, speak louder than words. The men who were with Abraham's servant were surely members of Abraham's covenantal community and, given the importance of the mission, they would have been selected to accompany the servant very carefully.

Would they have been aware of the details of the mission they were supporting? Would they have known about the oath that the servant had taken regarding never taking Isaac out of the Land of Canaan and only selecting a woman who was a member of Nahor's family to be the bride of Isaac and, therefore, the next matriarch of Abraham's covenantal community?

My father and my teacher, Harold Kopf, z"l, (January 4, 1920 - August 21, 1996) who served in the US Army during World War II, explained that every member of every unit was made aware of their unit's objective. He also explained that each man knew precisely who was next in line to command the unit should, for any reason, the current leader become unable to perform his duties or continue the mission. According to my father, the knowledge of the mission objective and of the exact line of succession in each US military unit was often what allowed missions to continue without interruption even during the heat of battle when such unexpected reversals of fortune might otherwise have resulted in disaster.

Given the matter at hand, we can only surmise that Abraham's servant would have put in place the necessary understanding among his compatriots that would insure that if anything should ever happen to him, that they would know what to do, how to do it and that they would do everything they could to get it done. How could it have been otherwise?

So, when Abraham's servant, back at Verse 33, declines to enjoy the foods set before him and his companions, we can understand completely why and how his companions would have declined to eat anything as well and that they would, rather, have hung on every word that the leader of their group would say; every breath he would take; every facial expression he would make; and would be studying intently the reactions of the members of Nahor and his family in hopes of reading their reactions and to be ready to help in any way that they could should such help become needed.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 45 of 65

Once Abraham's servant concluded his presentation and had received the approval and acceptance from Nahor and his family, the men in his group joined him in eating the food that had been set before them.

Genesis XXIV Verse 54 concludes by reporting that Abraham's servant and those in his company stayed the night and rose up in the morning and the servant said (to the family of Nahor) "Send me away unto my master." He could probably have made that same request the night before and then left in the morning with no ceremony or fanfare. By the morning, after staying over the night, he demonstrated his complete trust in his hosts and, then, honored them further by asking them to send him back to his master rather than just telling his hosts that he and his party would be leaving; ever the diplomat.

His counterparts were not nearly so diplomatic. Not by a long shot. In the next verse, Genesis XXIV Verse 55, the Torah tells us "And her (Rebecca's) brother and her mother said, 'Let the damsel live with us for a number of days after about ten (days) she will go.'" Rashi points out that again Laban is out in front of his parent. This time, it is his mother for whom he shows a lack of respect by speaking before she does. Rashi also notes that Rebecca's father, Bethuel, wanted to stop the wedding and that G-d sent an angel to stop Bethuel and, in doing so, Bethuel ended up dead.

There is also some light focused on how long Laban and his mother wanted Rebecca to wait before joining Isaac to be married. The Abarbanel (Don Isaac Abravanel 1437-1508) explains that it was customary for a "bride-to-be to be given ten months to a year to prepare for her marriage," which helps clarify the language of the Torah; i.e. "a number of days about ten" as being a colloquialism for "ten months or a year" and that Laban and his mother were within the normally expected and customary ways for things to transpire regarding marriage.

What Laban and his mother did not say is, in a way, as important as what they did say. They did not say that the servant should not go back to his master Abraham, only that he should leave Rebecca with them to prepare for her wedding, which is what normally would be done. In their own way, it might be said that they were being diplomatic as well.

The ways of diplomats are more than merely being polite and respectful. They are also expected to accomplish their mission in a timely fashion with a normal number of ruffled feathers on either side of the issues at hand.

Abraham's servant, in Genesis XXIV Verse 56, displayed his ability to remain respectful while conveying very pointedly and directly his need and desire to complete his mission by returning to his master (with Rebecca). His words are

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

emphatic but clearly respectful at the same time. “He said unto them: Delay me not (really, Do not delay me.) while G-d (which is written in what is known to be the merciful form) has been making my way prosperous (or more appropriately, successful; (so), send me out and I will go to my master.” Abraham’s servant clearly would not take “no” for an answer, but still, he extends all the courtesies that figuratively, if not actually, puts the controls in his hosts’ hands.

Never let it be said that Laban and his mother ever did anything that could be interpreted as having tried to manipulate Rebecca with regard to ... wait a moment! Were they not just playing the part of Rebecca’s spokespersons or agents in agreeing along with the others in their clan to her marriage to Isaac and then, in the follow-up issue dealing with when it would be fitting and proper for her to actually join Isaac in the Land of Canaan?

But, now, after Abraham’s servant drew what might be called a line in the sand on behalf of the L-rd regarding the timeline for Rebecca’s leaving her clan, Nahor’s family, to become the wife of Isaac, Laban and his mother lean away from their self-appointed position as Rebecca’s “representative” and, in Genesis XXIV Verse 57, put Rebecca front and center by asking whether she is ready to leave Aram-Naharaim with Abraham’s servant for the Land of Canaan now or if she preferred to wait. In doing so, Laban and his mother can no longer be seen as standing in opposition to the L-rd. We must keep in mind that even though they surely did not believe in the one and only G-d as Abraham did, they would not want to get on the wrong side of any god; big “G” or not, since they saw the world from a position of complete and total fear; where what or whomsoever controlled everything might be upset or angered, there was nothing that they were going to do to offend or rile up that or any god for fear of bringing on that god’s wrath against them.

The Rabbis take these verses where Rebecca’s family asks her if she wishes to go with Abraham’s servant to become the bride of Isaac as an indication that a woman can not legally be given away in marriage without her consent.

Rashi brings something else for us to understand about Rebecca from the way she responds to her family when they ask her in Genesis XXIV Verse 58 “Will you go with this man?” and she responds, “I will go.” Rashi adds “... even if you do not wish.” as a kind of understood subtext. Breishis Rabba 60:12 comments on Rashi saying, “I will go” rather than (simply) “yes” (is in support of and helps us understand how Rashi came to this conclusion.

Once Rebecca declared her willingness and conviction to leave her family without delay and to accompany Abraham’s servant to the Land of Canaan to become Isaac’s bride, her family apparently tied a bow around the entire episode as the Torah reports in Genesis XXIV Verse 59, “And they sent (away) their

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

sister Rebecca and her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men." There are those who translate "Vah-Yeshal-Chu" as "escorted" and build stories about who actually escorted her, but how they arrive at that translation is, to us, very puzzling. However, it is interesting to us how the Torah refers to Rebecca as "Ach-Oh-Sawm" or "their sister" when she is also their daughter and even their granddaughter. Why is her place in their family limited now to just that of sister? What do others say about this?

Rabbi Dr. Hertz points out that throughout the negotiations Laban, Rebecca's brother, had been the dominant figure from her family. No one seems to offer that by her being promoted to the betrothed of Isaac, who is destined to be the successor of Abraham, which would make her the co-leader and matriarch of Abraham's emerging covenantal community that she now can be seen as co-equal to even those who were only moments earlier her superiors; i.e. her parents and her grandparents. This could be the Torah's way of acknowledging the advancement in her rank.

There are also commentators who offer that the reason Rebecca's nurse was accompanying her was because Rebecca was three years old. It is difficult to make that piece of information fit into what we learned about Rebecca drawing water to satisfy the needs of at least ten camels and all the men in Abraham's servant's party. Not to mention the fairly sophisticated repartee between her and Abraham's servant. However, Ebn Ezra (Rabbi Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra 1089 – 1167) does comment that it was customary for the wet nurse of a young girl's infancy to remain with her as her servant for the rest of her life.

Then, in Genesis XXIV Verse 60, with all the grace and charm of the most experienced and deeply committed clergy person, someone from Rebecca's family blesses her with what is perhaps the greatest and most profound blessing one could imagine particularly given what we have learned about her family to this point. The Torah does not specify which member of her family delivered the blessing, which is also interesting. The entire family is credited. Did they recite it in unison? That is doubtful. But, the Torah is apparently interested in putting the emphasis on the blessing itself rather than focusing on any one of her family members who might have delivered it to her. "And they blessed Rebecca and said unto her, 'Our sister, be thou (or 'become' or 'live to be') the mother of thousands or tens of thousands and let thy seed possess the gates of those that hate them.'" This blessing is so much more than to have simply wished her happiness and health or even prosperity. Their blessing surely encompassed all of those elements but it is a blessing for the ages; a blessing for all time.

From where did this very profound blessing come? Was this, perhaps, a very typical blessing of the day? Did every girl who got married receive such a blessing? Rashi points out that the blessing uses the word "Aht" which means

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

“you” which seems somewhat superfluous since the blessing was clearly just meant for Rebecca. But, the MaHaRal (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel alternatively Lowe, or Löwe or Levai c. 1520 – September 17, 1609) clarifies this for us. According to the MaHaRal, Rashi was saying that the children who would come forth would be from Rebecca and not from another woman.

But, there is even more to this blessing. It has touched first time Jewish brides for as long as anyone can remember. When the Katuba (marriage contract) has been signed, the groom places a veil over his bride’s face. For some, it is customary to include blessings being recited by various other participants such as the fathers or the mothers of the bride and the groom. Some recite the tripartite blessing of the Kohaneem (Jewish priestly class): “May the L-rd Bless You and Guard You. May the L-rd cause His face to shed light upon you and be gracious unto you. May the L-rd lift up His face unto you and give you peace.” (Numbers VI Verses 23 – 27) Some communities ask that all those who witness the bedecking (veiling) of the bride recite the blessing or at least the first part of that blessing that was given to Rebecca by her family in Genesis XXIV Verse 60, “... be thou the mother of thousands; of tens of thousands ...”

The veiling of the bride can certainly be seen as a way for a husband to symbolically be separating his wife from everyone else; reserved exclusively for him. That is why the marriage ceremony is referred to as Kidusheen, which means separating from everything and everyone else and, thereby, hollowing or making holy.

There are those who make other interpretations from the bedecking ceremony and have it represent the special emotions connected with the joining of two individuals in such an important way as marriage. The veil, for example, can represent the love that we hope will cover the couple in their life together.

But, the one interesting thing that may get lost in all the wonderful symbolism of the bedeking moment, is that the blessing was originally made by Rebecca’s family, who, we must remember, were not at all like us as they were not members of the covenantal community of Abraham, even if they were his blood relatives, and that they were believers in other gods (small “g”). They were heathens, pagans and idolaters with values that did not encompass the same value for human life that was then and is still so key to Judaism and, later, with the advent of the two other monotheistic religions, to Christianity and Islam.

That the blessing given to Rebecca was special is, as stated earlier, almost unbelievable knowing all we know about the people who gave it. That the blessing given by them to Rebecca has become such an important part of the wedding tradition for first time Jewish brides (bedeking is not normally performed for brides who have been married before) is, in a way, even more remarkable.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

That a blessing that was originally made by heathens has been incorporated by Jews in their marriage ceremonies, even if more tangential in nature than part of the formal bonding procedures, has got to make one think, “What is going on here?”

We might be tempted to hypothesize about this phenomenon, but to do so would not resolve the issue and the question would still remain.

“And Rebecca and her maidens got up and rode on the camels and followed the man and the servant took Rebecca and went.” And, as simply as that, Genesis XXIV Verse 61 brings the curtain down on this extremely significant episode in the history of the world. We do not overstate things by saying that this moment is as significant as we say it is. Can we even imagine a world without the Jewish People? The world without the Jewish People would have ended as we understand other worlds created by G-d had been ended; destroyed. With no Rebecca at this juncture, the world would have been doomed to destruction.

The Baal HaTurim (Rabbi Jacob Ben Asher 1269 – 1340) points out to us that further on in the Torah, at Exodus II Verse 5, the word “Venah-Ah-Ro-She-Haw” or “And her maidens” is also used. That is the part of the Torah where “the Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river and her maidens walked along the riverside, and she saw the ark among the flags (a kind of reed of smaller growth than papyrus) and sent her handmaid to fetch it.” This was surely another significant moment in the history of the Jewish People and, consequently, in the history of the world. And, again, a young woman who was not of the covenantal community interfaces with a young man, in that case Moses, who was to play a key role in advancing the Jewish People and in allowing it to realize the continuance of its mission to serve as a light unto the Nations.

The Pharaoh’s daughter having maidens who accompany her is almost a given. We understand and appreciate it with ease. It may not be as easy, however, to see why there would be maidens who we are told accompanied Rebecca as she was leaving her family and heading to the Land of Canaan to marry Isaac and became the next matriarch of Abraham’s covenantal community.

The Pharaoh’s daughter was a princess. Rebecca was from a family with some substance in that they lived in a kind of compound with dwellings and various structures that was in close proximity to a dependable water source as was discussed earlier. But, there was nothing that would indicate that her family was particularly wealthy.

We can understand her “nurse” would be accompanying her and would be staying with her for the rest of her life. But, the maidens, who would be

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

accompanying her on her journey to her new life in the Land of Canaan and who would apparently be staying with her as well, are mentioned here for the first time. Are these maidens in the same category as Rebecca's nurse? Was it the rule for certain young women, when they would marry into another clan, to take with them other young women who would be their instant entourage and who would serve as a buffer against ever feeling totally cut off from their roots or feeling like total strangers?

The other and perhaps the greater question that comes to mind about these "maidens" is, "Who are they?" Are they related in some way to Rebecca or are they local young women who were employed as companions for Rebecca and who were committed to staying with her as what might be called her "ladies in waiting" and who would be expected to remain so and with her wherever Rebecca might go?

The Torah mentions them at this juncture as accompanying Rebecca and nothing else about them is provided to us. One would surmise that they would become part of Abraham's covenantal community as well. Beyond that, we can only guess that Nahor and his family would have only allowed Rebecca to have been in the company of hand picked young women who could be trusted to care for and look out for Rebecca's welfare under any circumstances.

In the same way that the outward bound journey was handled, the return trip to Abraham's covenantal community by Abraham's servant and now including Rebecca and her companions along with his own men is not mentioned by the Torah at all. As noted before, such journeys are never easy; particularly in those early times. But, we recall that the entire trek, both out and back, were to be protected by the L-rd.

Genesis XXIV Verses 62 to 66 details the meeting of Isaac and Rebecca and the concretization of their union, which would hopefully insure the future of what Abraham had started to the benefit of all mankind. Verse 62 reports that Isaac was traveling from "Beer-Lahchi-Rohee" and that he lived in the Land of the Negev; i.e. in the south. "Beer-Lahchi-Rohee" is the well associated with the story of Hagar and Rashi cites the Midrash (homiletic stories) that Isaac had travelled there to bring Hagar back as a wife for his father Abraham. This Midrash helps support the tradition that most of the commentators apparently favor, which is that Keturah mentioned in Genesis XXV Verse 1 as Abraham's second wife is actually Hagar.

The description of how Isaac and Rebecca met one another is quite lovely and even awe inspiring.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 51 of 65

In Genesis XXIV Verse 63, we are told, “And Isaac went out to the field at evening to ... the Hebrew word is “Law-Su-Ach” which has the root “Seh-Ch” which means to stroll or to take a walk. There is also a root that looks exactly like that same root word if one ignores the vowels and the all-important dot that is placed either above the right or the left arm of the letter Raish. If the dot is over the right arm, the root is “Shaw-Ch,” which would mean “to sink” or “to bow down” and from which we could see where “to meditate” or “to supplicate” or even “to pray,” as it is almost exclusively rendered, might come. Accepting this interpretation would allow us to fit Isaac in as the founder of the daily afternoon prayers we know as Mincha. Abraham is credited as having founded Shacharees (the daily morning prayers) based on Genesis XIX Verse 27 and Jacob is credited with having established Mariv (the daily evening prayers) based on Genesis XXVIII Verse 11.

But, the placement of that dot makes all the difference and turns the prayer or meditation that everyone wants it to have been into what may have included such activities but which was apparently simply a walk or a stroll. We are not saying that Isaac did not institute the afternoon prayer ritual. We are saying, however, that unless the traditionally accepted pronunciation of the word “Law-Su-Ach” is incorrect, this verse, Genesis XXIV Verse 63, is neither an indication that Isaac prayed in the afternoon and it is certainly not a proof that he did.

Genesis XXIV Verse 63 continues by telling us that Isaac was walking in the field at evening time and he lifted his eyes and saw camels coming. We, of course, know who the people are on those approaching camels. But, the suspense builds in the reader until the next verse confirms things for us.

“And Rebecca lifted up her eyes and when she saw Isaac she alighted from the camel.”(Genesis XXIV Verse 64) Rabbi Dr. Hertz observes that Rebecca’s dismounting her camel was a sign of respect for the person she had observed. Rashi offers that seeing the striking image of Isaac, even not knowing who he was, had a tremendous effect on her to where she leaned off to one side away from his view in an expression of her natural modesty, which was tantamount to leaning towards the ground. Most other commentators hold that she fell from the camel or dismounted quickly from the camel and then stood modestly. The Ramban (Nachmanidies – Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) 1194 – c. 1270, adds that once she learns that the person in her view was Isaac she veiled herself in an even deeper expression of that modesty. Rashi explains that though she was completely stricken by Isaac’s appearance she did not actually fully dismount the camel but, rather, leaned away so as not to be easily seen and, therefore, seemed to be leaning towards the ground.

Genesis XXIV Verse 65 begins with the word “Vah-Tomair” which is, “And she said” instead of a word that would indicate that she was asking a question and

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

not making a statement. Yet, the verse could easily be read as a question. But, from the Torah's use of the word "Vah-Tomair" "And she said..." It may not seem like much, but it well may be that the Torah is giving us a clue that this verse is really not to be read as a question at all but rather as a statement or, even more strongly than that, as an exclamation, which is to help us understand that Rebecca was obviously in today's parlance, "blown away" by the man she saw before her in the distance approaching their caravan. "What man is this that who walketh in the field to meet us!" (With an exclamation point and not a question mark). We must keep in mind that in the Torah there really are no punctuation marks other than grammatical dictates and what can be learned from the musical notations called "Trope," which are not actually written in the Torah itself but which can often provide help in determining where emphasis is supposed to be given and can even be helpful in determining the meaning of certain words or phrases.

If we are correct, then her exclamatory statement to the servant might almost read like this: "Wait just a cotton pickin' minute! Who on earth is that amazing man walking in that field and coming over to meet us!!!"

That could be the difference between the Torah's using the word "Vah-Tomair" "And she said" rather than any expression that would mean "And she asked." It is a big difference indeed if we go by the words that are there and not twist them to fit our personal expectations for what the story should be telling us.

Verse 65 continues, "And the servant said, 'It is my master.' And she took her veil and covered her face."

The servant was correct. Isaac was also his master. Though, we tend to wonder why he referred to Isaac in that way instead of telling Rebecca that the man by whom she was so stricken was the man she had come to marry. To offer a reason as to why the servant spoke in this way would be pure conjecture.

Who says arranged marriages take time before anything even approaching love can evolve between the two marriage partners? Apparently, Isaac's and Rebecca's marriage flies in the face of that assumption. Of course, theirs was a match that can be said to have been truly made, if not in heaven, then by Heaven.

In Genesis XXIV Verse 66, we learn that the servant told Isaac of all the things that he had been doing. Rashi mentions that what the servant would have related to Isaac were the things that the L-rd had done to help him accomplish his objectives. The Mizrachi (Elijah Mizrachi Rabbi and author of the super-commentary on Rashi's commentary known as the Mizrachi c. 1455 – 1525)

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

explains that what the servant would have reported were the miraculous things that the L-rd had done.

As formal as things were in Aram-Naharaim while Abraham's servant was negotiating with Nahor and his family to be able to bring Rebecca back to become Isaac's wife is as informal and extemporaneous as things apparently were when Isaac and Rebecca finally did meet each other.

Genesis XXIV Verse 67 "And Isaac arrived (with) her at the tent of Sarah his mother. And he took Rebecca and she became his wife and he loved her. And Isaac was consoled following the death of his mother."

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh, z"l, (June 20, 1808 – December 31, 1888) draws our attention to how this verse (Genesis XXIV Verse 67) describes the meeting of Isaac and Rebecca. Though the verse presents a very straight forward report seemingly devoid of anything that even approaches the feelings of these very important personalities in our history; i.e. the history of our world really, the sequence "... and he took Rebecca, and she became a wife unto him and he loved her..." has within it, according to Rabbi Hirsh, something valuable and interesting for us to consider and from which we may learn a way of bringing a level of love into our lives that is of the highest order.

Rabbi Hirsh observes,

"In modern life we place 'he loved her' first and write, 'He loved Rebecca, he took her and she became his wife.' But, however it is that love shall precede marriage, it is far more important that it continue after marriage. The modern attitude lays all the stress on the romance before marriage; the olden Jewish view seems to emphasize lifelong devotion and affection after getting married."

Others translate this verse by adding certain words perhaps to make their translation of the verse "flow" better or to make it conform to what they believe may have happened. Some have the verse say that Isaac and Rebecca entered the tent. The words do not really support that translation. The verse says he brought her "to" the tent or "towards" the tent (that's the Brooklyn Hey again) but it does not say he brought her "into" the tent. The verse does say that he "took her" but that "took her" has to do with having consummated their marriage physically. We can see where it might be tempting to use their proximity to Sarah's tent as a convenient if not a logical extension into saying they entered the tent. However, it can just as easily be seen that there are certain sensibilities regarding how a son might prefer to hold his late mother's abode in reverence and, therefore, not choose to use it as the place to consummate his marriage. That interpretation could be just as logically appreciated and understood.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 54 of 65

One might ask, “Why make such a fuss about this?”

Why? We do so because it is there. We do so because it is the Torah. And, we do so because many readers do not read or understand Hebrew and, therefore, depend on the translation or translations that published versions of the Bible present as being accurate. We would feel better about any of the translations if they would indicate that certain words are added in order to make the text read or flow better but also state that those added words are not part of the actual “black letter text” in the Torah; but are being added by the translator for whatever reason they may have had.

There are some questions that can be raised about what Genesis XXIV Verse 66 describes:

Why did Sarah have her own tent?

Why would she not have shared a tent with Abraham?

Why were they living in tents at all if the covenantal community was as well entrenched in its locale as it seems to have been and if Abraham was as financially successful as we are led to believe he was?

Following the death of Sarah, when Abraham purchased the Cave of Machpelah and the lands surrounding it, would he not have established more permanent structures in which to live rather than to continue to live in tents?

We did see, above, that it was common for the women in a communal living compound to have their own structure in which to live when certain work had to be done or perhaps at certain other times. So, that could explain why Sarah had maintained her own tent. Why Sarah’s tent remained in a state of suspended animation, almost like a shrine to her memory, after her death is another question. Some commentators say it was awaiting the new matriarch, which would make sense.

The Torah concludes its introduction and the ushering in of Rebecca to us in a plain and simple fashion and, at the same time, inexorably ties Rebecca to her predecessor Sarah as matriarch of Abraham’s covenantal community through Rebecca’s new connection to Sarah’s son Isaac.

Surely, the effect mothers have on their sons can be seen as being of monumental importance no matter to what level that experience or lack of it might be. Sons are stamped in one way or another by everything their mothers do or do not do for and to them. It is then the nature of things that sons relate to their spouse and, thereby, find a way or ways of rounding out the special feelings of acceptance, importance, self-worth, joy and love that help define their lives.

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 55 of 65

The reciprocal of this important cycle of completion of feelings are those felt by the spouses of those sons who started life similarly stamped by their own mothers and who are in need of completion of the same circle of emotional connection.

Having described in great detail the bringing together of Isaac and Rebecca as the successors of Abraham's covenantal community, the Torah now turns to the founding father of this community; Abraham himself, and carefully documents his relationship to his other offspring and describes the limit of his relationship to his second wife and his the children he had with her.

But, let us first put this into perspective with what might be called the overall mission or objective of the Torah, which is, according to the Stone Edition of "The Torah" by Rabbi Nosson Scherman (b – 1935; Newark,NJ) General Editor of the Art Scroll Mesorah Publications, to tell "the story of the development of G-d's Chosen People, any events tangential to this primary theme are extraneous. (page 121).

It can be seen at various places in the Torah that, when a particular person's contribution to the story of the Jewish People has been completed, the Torah will review that person's life and continue telling the overall story from there despite the fact that that person may live for years after that point. But, apparently, as far as the Torah is concerned, once that part of the life of the person who helped advance the story of the Jewish People has been related, the remainder of that person's life is of lesser importance and may be simply enumerated or noted but without the depth of focus as that part of the person's life that had a direct and profound effect on the "making" of the Jewish People.

So, even in the case of Abraham, the founder of the Jewish People, once his unique and extremely important mission to insure the continuance of the Jewish People by providing a proper wife for his son Isaac, the Torah moves forward by relating the final chapter of Abraham's life with the apparently less consequential aspects of it, in his case, listing his children by his other wife and how he provided for them and, then, the details of his death and burial by his sons Isaac and Ishmael.

Chapter XXV Verse 1 tells us that Abraham took a wife whose name was Keturah. But, the word that was chosen to begin this section dealing with what will be the end of Abraham's life is Vah-Yosehf, which means "and he continued" or "and he went on" or "and he added to" or "and he increased," which is a very positive statement indeed considering the section will be telling of his demise.

There is a tendency to want to take the statements of the Torah as episodic; i.e. that they present a kind of timeline of historical occurrences; that things

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

happened exactly in the order reported. However, that is not necessarily the case and, quite often, it is not the case at all. Here, we learn of the search for Rebecca to be Isaac's wife when Abraham was in his 140th year. We are told that Abraham takes another wife and of the children he had with her. But it does not necessarily mean things happened in that sequential order. But, we must know that if the order is important it will be made known to us. Otherwise, it will just be related and not to be regarded of any more importance than that. That said, even if the order of events is consequential the other elements are not and need to be carefully considered when one is interested in gaining as full an appreciation of what the Torah is teaching.

Rashi explains that Keturah is actually Hagar, who Abraham had now remarried after the death of Sarah. Her new name was earned because her deeds were as beautiful as incense (Ketores) and because she remained chaste (Keturah is Aramaic for "restrained") from the time she was separated from Abraham. There is also an interesting observation from Rashi about the difference between a wife and a concubine. Rashi holds that in the Talmud Sanhedrin 21A it says both wives and concubines are married but wives have a marriage contract and concubines do not.

The Ramban focuses on something else. He helps us understand just how much of a strategic thinker Abraham really was. When it was of the utmost importance for him to make sure that Isaac marry a woman from his own lineage; from the family of Nahor in Haran, he did all that he could to insure that it would happen. Once that was accomplished, he could be with a woman who was not of that lineage because it would be through Isaac that the covenantal community would be continued and no longer through him alone. The Ramban points out that the same would be the requirement for Jacob's wife as it was for Isaac's wife and for the same reason.

Abraham lived on from that period at the age of 140 years to the age of 175 years before he died. His unusually long life and continued productivity with Keturah/Hagar is credited, according to "HaAymek Devar" (which means "Delve into the matter"), which was the popular name for Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, z"l, (1816 - 1893) also known as Reb Hirsh Leib Berlin and the Nitziv) not to a new miracle but to the residual effect of the reinvigoration he had been blessed to experience.

Rashi observes that Rabbi Nehemiah said that what the Torah is telling us in Verse 5 is that Abraham gave Isaac his right to dispense blessings because G-d had said to Abraham "and you shall be for a blessing," which means "the blessings are given over to your hand to bless whomever you wish. And Abraham gave them over to Isaac. Mizraci clarifies this even further. The Torah had already told us Abraham had given Isaac all of his possessions in Chapter

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 57 of 65

XXIV Verses 10 and 36. Here, in Chapter XXV Verse 5, it means he gave him the power to bless others.

In Chapter XXV Verses 1 through 4, the children and grandchildren who Abraham had through Keturah/Hagar, are listed. Rashi points out that in Verse 3 that the names of Assurim and Letushim, who were descendants (grandchildren) of Abraham through Keturah/Hagar. Their real names were Asshur and Letush but were given in the plural because they were heads; i.e. progenitors of nations, which is clarified for us by Mizrachi, z"l, (circa 1455 to 1525 or 1526) who was a Talmudist and "posek" an authority on Halacha (Jewish Law) and who was also known as "Re'em" the Hebrew acronym for Rabbi Elijah Mizrachi, coinciding with the Biblical name of an animal sometimes translated as "unicorn." He was the author of a super commentary on Rashi's commentary on the Torah entitled Sefer Ha-Mizrachi.

In Verse 5, the Torah tells us that everything Abraham had he gave to Isaac. But, before anyone can feel that some kind of rule of fairness had been breached, in Verse 6, we learn that to his children from his concubine he gave gifts and, while he was still alive, sent them away from Isaac "eastward toward the Land of the East."

There is no "explanation" given by the Torah. There are commentators who help us to understand why Abraham did this. But, at the most simple or primary level, just at the level that he did this, and with no reasons given for why, it can be seen that for Abraham, Isaac was paramount and that although his other children were acknowledged by Abraham, he did whatever he could to solidify Isaac's future and, thereby, the future of his covenantal community, which apparently included directing his other offspring to relocate away from Isaac; to the east ... "eastward toward the Land of the East." It is not explained by the Torah why that the Eastward direction was chosen by Abraham for his other children to head and relocate. But, at this simple level, it is clear that he wanted them out of the neighborhood or community where Isaac would be located. For whatever reason, he wanted them gone.

The next generation of Abraham's covenantal community having been more than adequately provided for with Isaac and Rebecca as the leaders with an ample financial foundation given over to them, with any potential claims against that fortune from Abraham's other offspring having been neutralized by his having directed his other offspring to relocate eastward. Abraham had done in life all that he could.

Twenty generations before Abraham, Adam and Eve had been created and placed in the world created by the L-rd to enjoy the pleasures of that world and to help one another to do so. Some how, through their own human frailty, Adam

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

and Eve got off on the wrong foot and mankind found itself wandering around seemingly unable to get back on G-d's path to happiness. So, much so that Noah, just ten generations after Adam and Eve, was selected by the L-rd to make a brand new start when the remainder of mankind had showed itself to have gone so far off the deep end that it had become worse than the animals in that animals were doing what they were intended to do because they were animals. Mankind was intended to be of a higher level of creature, but had, save for Noah and his family, become so degraded that they had to be destroyed. The flood wiped out all the animals that walked on the earth and all of mankind except for Noah and his family.

The laws of living that were established for that new beginning of the world were what we refer to as the Noahide Laws; The Seven Commandments of the Sons of Noah. They, still to this day, stand as the acid test to determine the difference between mankind and barbarians; i.e. those unworthy of being permitted to exist on the earth.

Finally, with the advent of Abraham, ten generations after Noah, the world was back on G-d's track toward hopefully evolving away from the worship of false gods, away from such practices as human sacrifice or child sacrifice and other such abominable activities that are antithetical to enjoying the world provided to us by the L-rd and helping others less fortunate than we might be to do so as well.

It was Abraham, who had seen beyond his own father's work as a creator of idols for idol worshipers to worship, that there was someone or something or some force that he could not really know or really understand, who or that was the creator of all creators, the G-d of all gods, the One True G-d. And, in discovering G-d, he was able to forge with G-d a covenantal agreement that became the foundation of what we know today as Judaism, which is a way of life that is life oriented; the antithesis of everything Abraham had seen in the people around him. His was a whole new way of thinking. His was a whole new way of believing. His was a life affirming faith in a G-d of mercy and justice. A new concept for the world and one that would require time and untold generations to keep before mankind as a light by which and to which mankind will hopefully and eventually find its way.

Now, Abraham was done with his part of that process and the Torah states in Genesis Chapter XXV Verse 7 the total number of years of his very special life. It does so in a somewhat curious way. "And these are the days of the years of the life of Abraham that he lived; one hundred year and seventy year and five years."

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

Rashi compares this summation style in a similar way to how Sarah's life had been summarized at its end. Rashi says it means Abraham was like five years old throughout his life in that he was always without sin.

The Seder Olam ("Order of the World" – a chronological record extending from Adam to the Bar Kochba revolt and first referred to as Seder by Abraham ibn Yar Ha-Manhig in 1855) comments that "the days of the years ..." tells us that Abraham wasted not one single day of his entire life.

Chapter XXV Verse 8 reports the death of Abraham and, though it says "and he was gathered unto his people" the phrase is more representative than actual in that his "people" were back in Mesopotamia. Verse 8 is a reference to Genesis Chapter XV Verse 15 where Abraham had just learned that his people would eventually be slaves in a strange land for 400 years but will also eventually be freed and will emerge from that place with great wealth. He is told, "And you will go to your forefathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age." We are advised in this statement that "the Hebrew People were not unacquainted with the doctrine of immortality. Here the return of the soul to the eternal abodes of the fathers is, with some distinctness, separated from the interment of the body. That both can not be identical is evident, for while Abraham was entombed in the Land of Canaan, all his forefathers died and were buried in Mesopotamia." This helpful and clarifying commentary was made by Markus Moritz Kalisch, z"l, (1825 to 1885).

In Genesis Chapter XXV Verse 9 and 10, we are told that "Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah" and everything about the cave's location and from whom Abraham had purchased it and that both he and his wife Sarah were buried there. This indicated that Isaac and Ishmael his half-brother had reconciled. Rashi explains that the fact that Ishmael repented and permitted Isaac to precede him at Abraham's funeral is the "good old age" which had been referred to or promised regarding Abraham earlier in the Sedrah.

The end of the Sedrah seems to come in waves. First, are the final years and the death of Abraham. Next, we learn in Genesis Chapter XXV Verse 11 that following the death of Abraham that the L-rd blessed Isaac his son and that Isaac lived next to Beer-lahai-roi. Rashi explains that the blessing of Isaac by the L-rd was the passing on of the blessings given by the L-rd to Abraham to Isaac. Finally, we are told of the highlights and descendants of Ishmael, how long he lived and where his descendants settled, which was near Egypt, toward Assyria, and that his descendants dwelt over all his brothers, which Rashi explains meant that they needed more room than their land allowed so they had to move into areas inhabited by their brethren to accommodate their needs. Rashi also notes that Verse 18 says "over all his brothers he lay," that the word "Nafal" is used, which means "to fall." Here, Rashi explains that while Abraham was alive Ishmael

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 60 of 65

was motivated to live a more respectful and positive life. When Abraham had died, Ishmael's life fell in terms of quality and he started on a decline.

The Sedrah Chayei Sarah ends in this way to bring these hugely important figures to a proper and clear conclusion and thereby, to set the scene for the next part of this all important chronicling of what is both the history and the promise that is the Jewish People and its crucial mission and place in becoming the light unto nations of the world.

Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31

The Book of Kings documents the history of the Jewish monarchy from the final days of King David through to the Babylonian exile. The first chapter, which serves as the Haftara for the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, tells of the succession of leadership plans that were put in place by King David. However, it does not reveal it as having been a very well planned process. Because of that, one thing that we might learn from this part of the story at the most simple or obvious level is that leadership succession needs to be actually put in place and sooner than later if one is to do justice to one's dependants, constituents and or subjects and the legacy one wishes to leave behind.

In the first few verses, I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 4, we are introduced to King David at a time of his life where he is almost entirely dependent on those who serve his personal needs. He is profoundly cold; so cold that he shivers so deeply that even extra blankets do not bring him the desired level of warmth. His caretakers come up with a plan to have him cared for by and to lie with a beautiful young woman in hopes that her "heat," if not the nature of the experience itself, will give him the warmth he lacks. We are told that the plan is executed, but that "he did not know her." By which is meant that they did not engage in sexual intercourse. We are not told if the desired effect; to provide King David with the warmth he needed, actually worked. But, we can surmise that it did since it did not tell us it did not work and he was apparently able to function sufficiently to choose the successor to his throne.

Why did we have to be told of this unusual exercise in heat generation? Perhaps it was the author's way of demonstrating just how old King David was at that time. He was apparently not ill as such; just very old and feeling the effects of his advanced age; i.e. "stricken in years" (I Kings Chapter I Verse 1). It also allows us to understand how much in control of his life he was and that he was still rational and able to make decisions, even if he was physically very fragile and possibly in a very steep decline.

Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31 by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 61 of 65

When push came to shove for King David; i.e. when he was confronted by the succession plans for his throne by his son Adonijah the son of Haggith, it is important that we understand that King David's reaction, which was to reject out of hand Adonijah's efforts to claim the throne and, instead, to name his son Solomon as his successor came from a clear thinking King even if his age was very limiting to him in other respects.

We can see certain common or at least similar points where the Sedrah and the Haftara can be compared or related; one to the other.

The Sedrah deals with Abraham in his old age and the Haftara deals with King David in his old age.

The Sedrah deals with the succession of Isaac as the next leader of Abraham's covenantal community with an amazingly detailed focus on identifying and locating Rebecca, the successor to Sarah, the matriarch of the covenantal community. The Haftara deals with the appointment of Solomon as successor to King David.

However, it would be very unfair of us to come away from this Haftara with the impression that King David had completely ignored succession planning until it was nearly too late. As proof of that, the Haftara does detail for us the role Bathsheba, King David's wife, played in this process. She reminds King David that he had promised her that their son Solomon would reign on his throne after David. But, apparently, that promise had remained known only to Bathsheba. For some reason, King David had apparently done nothing formal to make his plans and intentions for Solomon to succeed him as king known to his subjects. Why he would have chosen to put off taking any formal action regarding his succession may be the question for us to ponder.

None of us wants to think that in the very next moment we might be dead. As they might say in Brooklyn, "Fah-Get-About-It" It is just too upsetting. Death is so final; and, no matter when or how it comes, it always comes too soon; and as a complete surprise. Perhaps that is why so many of us, including apparently King David, choose to put off doing things that deal with our own eventual demise, such as making a will, purchasing a burial plot or, in the case of King David, formally selecting a successor to his throne.

Facing one's own mortality is mortifying in the oldest and most obsolete sense of the word; it can destroy one's strength, vitality or one's ability to function. In short, "It'll kill ya."

In the more modern sense, mortify means to cause (someone) to feel very embarrassed and foolish. And, coincidentally, in Talmud Baba Metzia pages 59a

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 62 of 65

and 58b, it says that causing one to feel embarrassed, like when one is made to blush or to turn red, it is considered by Chazal (the wise men of the Talmud) to be the same as if one had murdered that person. Rabbi Jacob “Jack” Abramowitz of the Orthodox Union on its website refers to Commandment Number 240: Red-Faced; the Prohibition against embarrassing others. He points out that the same topic is discussed in the Talmud at tractate Shabbas (the Sabbath) on pages 54b and 55a and in Arachin [vows (of the value of a person)] on page 16b and that the commandment applies to both men and to women at all times and everywhere.

At first blush it, might appear that, somehow, even the great King David allowed the important task of naming his successor to remain on the back burner until he was almost forced to take care of it. It seems that old age just snuck up on King David, because, before he finally was pressed to declare his successor by name, the succession was, according to our Haftara, heading in a completely different direction.

Adonijah the son of Haggith, one of King David’s sons, had taken it upon himself to make himself the King even while his father King David, who was perhaps on his last legs, was still very much alive. Adonijah had done certain things that in those times would be things that only a very powerful person, who was trying to flex his leadership muscles to the public, would do. He got himself some fancy “wheels” and had a hoard of fifty men run in front of it when he moved from place-to-place. That kind of commotion gets you noticed. It was the “loud speaker” of the day. He threw a huge party with all sorts of free food, which also always gains a lot of attention and demonstrates a person’s power while indicating a certain amount of desire to be or at least to seem to be, magnanimous towards those who partake of the feast with him. Adonijah invited all the right people to his celebratory event but was careful not to include those who were still close to King David and who might take steps to defuse his efforts to depose the King and assume the mantel of leadership for himself. There were those who supported and who apparently plotted with Adonijah to make his ascension to the throne a reality. On the other hand, there were those who saw what was taking place and who took steps to alert King David before what was clearly a rebellion got too far out of hand.

Bathsheba and Nathan the Prophet go before King David, make him aware of what is being done and, even in his weakened state; he is able to ask of Bathsheba, who had come before him but who had not said anything until that point, “What concerns you?”

It must have been a very emotional and dramatic moment for all those involved. Bathsheba and Nathan acted very gingerly in their approach to King David. King David was apparently just able to speak to them with the last bit of his strength

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

that he had in his withered state. But, none the less, he saw what was happening and pledged to remedy the situation by keeping his long term promise to Bathsheba by making Solomon his successor and saying that he would do it that very day.

The Haftara concludes with Bathsheba bowing to the King and blessing him by saying, "May my Lord King David live forever." The literal translation of her blessing is closer to, "Let there be life to my master the King David for the world," which does mean "forever." But, the literal meaning may take on special meaning here. It was a phrase that was, more than likely, uttered perfunctorily like the way we say, "G-d bless you" after someone sneezes, to where G-d in His Majesty all but becomes forgotten and meaningless it is so automatic.

But, in this instance, when King David had just promised to finally take care of such an important matter, Solomon's succession to his throne, the perfunctory becomes amazingly more important and helps capture for us the magnitude of the moment. The level of importance of this moment in the history of the Jewish People and, therefore, of the World, was huge. Adonijah as King of the Jewish People could only have been a disaster.

And, so, in realizing this, the relationship of our Sedrah to the Haftara becomes far more profound than the check list of comparison points observed at first glance.

Old age of our leaders? Check!

Doing what needs to be done to insure continuity? Check!

But now, the overarching message for each of us to learn and to apply in our own lives today, and on an absolutely every single day basis becomes clear.

How many of us have reckoned in a cavalier way that a hundred years from now none of what we are concerned about today will matter? But, the truth is that only some of that reckoning need be correct. It is up to us, rather, to be able to say that a hundred years from now much of what we are concerned about today may not matter, but I want to be working on, for, about and with things that will matter.

Our Sedrah demonstrates the tenacity and conviction of Abraham and his unshakable faith in what he was doing and of its monumental importance not just to him, but for untold numbers of generations to come and for all of mankind "Le-Olum;" forever. The Haftara presents for us an object lesson of a great man, King David, who had made the right choice early on, but who let almost his entire life happen before finally taking the necessary steps to insure that his vision for the future of his throne would come to fruition.

[Everything Counts: A Commentary on the Sedrah Chayei Sarah, The Life of Sarah Genesis XXIII: 1 - XXV: 18 and the Haftara Chayei Sarah I Kings Chapter I Verses 1 to 31](#) by Drew Kopf see www.echelonartgallery.com

© 2015 Drew Kopf

Page 64 of 65

We learn the importance of our self-chosen mission must be matched by our faith in it and our faith in ourselves to bring it about and to insure its continuance; and that following through on our plan without delay is crucial since we have no guarantee that our ability to do so later will be possible. In short, we learn that everything counts.

May each of us be blessed to concern ourselves with activities that will matter Le-Olum, forever, and may we be blessed to be as dedicated and as attentive to make everything count “LeTova;” for good.