

סעודת שלישית

Introduction: I had hoped to leave this format behind when we moved to the new building, but the challenges of the pandemic have led to a temporary suspension of our post Mincha learning and I feel fortunate that we can still connect through this medium.

Additionally, since this is the first Shabbat since the tragic passing of Rav Sacks, I want to dedicate this week's edition to his memory. In an effort to pay tribute to this great man whose words, both written and oral, influenced so many people throughout the world, the answers will come from his thoughts on the parsha.

As always, my intent is that the questions posed will spur your own original insights, and then I will share the ideas of Rav Sacks.

#1 Parshat Chaya Sarah opens with the death of Sarah and the efforts of Avraham to bury her properly. This is the culmination of so many challenges that he has endured and it would be natural for Avraham to be despondent and broken. Surprisingly, that is not the case and in fact when he begins his search for a wife for Yitzchak, the Torah describes that Hashem has blessed him with everything. How can this be? He has gone through so much, and Hashem has not yet fulfilled the two main promises that he was given multiple times (he does not have the land of Israel and his successor is still single); how can he be so serene?

#2 Building on the latter point, on numerous occasions Hashem guaranteed Avraham that he would have countless children and that they would inherit the land of Israel. As the individual who epitomized faith in G-d, he surely believed that these promises would come true, so why in our parsha do we find him so pressed to find a wife for Yitzchak and working so hard to purchase a portion of the land? Why didn't he simply trust Hashem to keep His word?

Answer: Rav Sacks zt'l offered beautiful suggestions to these questions that complement one another. He notes that Avraham was teaching us the simple, yet profound, lesson that it is critical for us to do our part. To quote him directly "G-d promises, but we have to act." Going further he says "Despite all the promises, God does not and will not do it alone. By the very act of self-limitation (tzimtzum) through which He creates the space for human freedom, God gives us responsibility, and only by exercising it do we reach our full stature as human beings."

Moving back to the first question, once the process had started – Avraham had acquired Maarat Hamachpela and he was blessed with Yitzchak – then his deep emunah rose to the fore and he was at peace. Having done his part, he had total confidence that Hashem will do the rest.

These combined thoughts can be particularly meaningful as we deal with our daily difficulties. We must recognize the role that each one of us must play – after all "G-d promises, but we have to act." – but once we have put in our effort, then we must recall that ultimately our fate is in His hands.