

## Parshat Chaye Sara 5779

**Middos Tovos & Lavan** From this week's Sedra, one can learn many Mitzvos. They are not (as is usually the case) from "the Taryag" as they concern Middos Tovos – consideration for others, kindness and chesed.

So at the beginning of the Sedra we learn of the Mitzvah of Kevuras Hames, giving a Hessed and Mourning and Weeping. Meam Loez asks why it is necessary to mention that Avraham came to mourn and weep for Sara. Surely this was obvious, and he queries how this is reflected in the principle that no word in the Torah is superfluous. He answers that it is to teach us "how important it is to mourn and eulogise a good person".

Regarding Nihum Avelim - in Sotah 14a, the Gemara learns from Chapter 25:11 that just as Hashem comforts mourners, so must we do so.

What did Eliezer look for in finding a wife for Yitzhak? A girl full of Middos Tovos and Tznius, but who would nonetheless rush to do Chesed – in the event it was Rivka who would provide a drink to Eliezer and offer (without being asked) to water his 10 camels (Chapter 24:14). Kerem Hazvi explains that this was a very onerous task - a thirsty camel can drink up to 30 gallons of water at a time. Yet Rivka gladly gave them all they wanted "until they have finished drinking" (Chapter 24:19 & 22).

We also learn manners and dinnim. Orach Chayim 170 para 1. says that one is not allowed to speak whilst eating in case of choking. That is why in verse 19 Rivka waited until Eliezer finished drinking before suggesting to him that she feed the camels.

We learn from Rivka that one can drink before ensuring ones animals have been watered (see verse 14). In Berachos 40a we learn however that when it comes to food, animals must come first - as we say in 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph of Shema ("I will provide grass in your field for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied"). So too in verse 32, the camels were fed and only in in verse 33 did Eliezer have food set before him (In Igrot Moshe, Orach Chayim part 32 chapter 52, Rav Moshe Feinstein mentions that babies have precedence over animals!)

**Lavan – did he have any Middos Tovos?** There is an interesting difference of opinion in the Midrash as to whether Lavan's name is in praise of him or has derogatory connotations (see Bereishit Rabbah, Chapter 60 and Bemidbar Rabbah Chapter 6:14).

The first opinion takes Lavan as meaning white (in fact "whiter than white"), perhaps because he had such an extremely pale skin. One explanation in the Midrash of "white" is in connection with a very swift horse who was called "white-foot". This is

complimentary to Lavan who was *zerizim* – those who have passion and excitement to act speedily. So it was Lavan who ran immediately to greet Eliezer (Chapter 24:29).

The other opinion explains the word Lavan as "white-hot" i.e. with wickedness (cf the koshering of kelim on a naked flame, which is called *libbun*). Lavan it mentions used to invite guests and then considerably embarrass them by demanding payment at the end of the meal. Partly due to this, he had a name of creating many "white faces".

**Word Order of "The Wicked" and "The Righteous" in Tenach** Word order in the Tenach is considered to be of great importance. In this connection, there is a rule of *Rashaim kodmim lishmon, aval Tzadikim shemon kodmin*. That is, whenever the Tenach introduces the name of a person, if he is wicked, the name comes first. So it states: Novol was his name, Golyas (Goliath) shemo, Sheva ben Bichri shemo. Whereas if he is righteous, the actual name comes second. So it states: and his name was Elkanah, Ushemo Yishai, Ushemo Boaz, Ushemo Mordechai, Ushemo Manoach. The Medrash notes that it states: Ushemi Hashem.

The explanation for this seems to be regarding "where is the person's own emphasis?". A Rasha is full of himself, egocentric. He therefore puts himself first indicating his arrogance. However, a Tzadik is humble and does not boast about his achievements and greatness, therefore he puts himself second.

**Why then Ushemo Lavan?** So the obvious question is why is the wicked Lavan introduced in the manner of the righteous, with "ushemo" given first? The reason suggested by the Or HaChaim is based on the seemingly difficult sequence of the verses. In Chapter 24:29, which contains the illusion to Lavan's righteousness, he is described as running towards Eliezer even before he heard the full account of the episode from Rivka (verse 30). When he heard that a stranger had accosted his sister, he hurried to defend her honour (verse 29) - only later, when he heard the full story did he learn that Eliezer had acted properly and honourably. Because Lavan is introduced to us as a brother acting virtuously in what he thought was in defence of his sister, he is described in accord with his deed – righteously.

This explanation however would still leave us with the difficulty, if following the view of Rashi and the opinion in the Midrash, as they say that everything Lavan did was wholly bad.

דבר תורה לפרשת השבוע לעילוי נשמת אמי מורתי מרת צינא בת הרב יחזקאל הלוי ע"ה

ביום היארצייט לפטירתה כ"ז חשוון

