



Parashat Chaye Sarah - #304

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On the Parashah...

The Significance of the Discussions of our Forefathers' Servants

[Tal Chermon]

This Torah portion discusses Eliezer's mission to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. The Torah relates the event at great length, devoting about seventy verses to it. It is in fact repeated twice – once when the events actually happen and once when Eliezer recounts the story to Rivkah's family. Eliezer was in fact adamant that he tell the whole tale, as he said: "I will not eat until I speak my piece" (Bereshit 24:33). Interestingly enough, there is an inordinate amount of "speaking" going on here about a subject that does not seem to be of such great importance! Surely there are far more important topics, such as the laws of Shabbat, which fill entire volumes of Halachah books and yet only warrant a few verses in the Torah itself. We must conclude therefore that Eliezer's discussion is a very important matter, as our Rabbi tells us: "The discussions of our forefather's servants are more pleasing to G-d than even the Torah study of the sons." The mere fact that Eliezer's narrative is repeated twice, while many important halachic principles were given only by remote indications in the Torah, proves this point (Rashi on Bereshit 24:42 quoting Bereshit Rabbah 60:8).

Spiritual elevation can be achieved in one of two ways – by the study of spiritual ideas or by spiritual experience itself. The first path is a process of intellect and analysis while the second is a form of spiritual influence emanating from an inner vision and experience. Our prophets of old did not attempt to explain or convince people by logical proofs, but rather expressed these inner truths through themselves. People who met them were then influenced and inspired by the very spiritual experience of coming into contact with the personality of the prophet (The period of the prophets coincided with the period that philosophers flourished in Greece. For example, Yirmiyahu lived at the time of Pythagoras. The Greek philosophers

employed rational explanation while the prophets used the alternative method of spiritual influence).

The prophets did not stress the importance of Torah study. Naturally, they themselves were outstanding Torah scholars, but this is not mentioned in the Tanach because life and study were not separate disciplines for the prophets. Our prophets were not like us. Today we live in a dichotomous state in which we devote part of our time to Torah study and spend the rest of our time "living our lives." For them, their entire lives were Torah. Even when they were involved in mundane matters, their whole approach emanated from the depth of their personality which was entirely Torah. The experience of an encounter with such a "personality of Torah," even when it involved only secular matters, made for more of an impact than an analytical study of a thousand books.

The ideal of Torah study is not stressed in the Tanach, but this is not because it is unimportant. The leading Torah personalities obviously learned day and night but their studies were not an isolated aspect of their lives – rather they were a most natural part their existence – life itself. Their deep-rooted connection to the Torah, which is manifested today by its study, was revealed in every action and word spoken in those times.

Yehoshua had to be specially charged to "meditate on it [the Torah] day and night" (Yehoshua 1:8), since he was on the verge of the conquest of Israel during which he would be fully occupied in his task as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, planning and executing military operations. Under the circumstance, there was a need to emphasize the obligation of Torah study despite his heavy national burden. In ordinary times, however, it is taken for granted that one must always to be attached to the Torah.

Every Jew must therefore aspire to achieve the level of the "servants of our forefathers" who manifested the Torah not only in their studies, but, like Eliezer, servant of Avraham, even in their most mundane conversations.

Rav Aviner on...

That Serpent the Internet

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – translated by R. Blumberg]

The Internet really is a serpent. It's the evil impulse. That serpent in Eden looked friendly. It promised things that were very fine: "You will be like G-d" (Bereshit 3:5). Yet all of that is the counsel of the evil impulse. Just so, the Internet looks friendly, but it is the evil impulse.

The Internet makes for a lot of problems. Yet the worst problem is the plethora of filthy videos which have gotten so bad that the paper is ashamed to bear their description. A study done a year ago at Tel-Chai College revealed that 90% of youth

watch those videos, in other words, high school age boys between fourteen and eighteen. True, it says on the side that viewing is permissible only above age eighteen, but in actual fact nobody is checking and many boys start watching at age ten. True, girls watch it less, but they watch it as well, and religious youth are no exception.

All this involves a two-fold evil. First, the very watching involves a severe prohibition, as is explained in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 307:16, which states that it is forbidden to read books that provoke the evil impulse. This applies all the more so to those vile videos, whose prohibition does not just constitute a stricture but an outright law to which every upright Jew and every upright non-Jew will agree. Second, those videos truly do arouse the evil impulse and corrupt the thoughts of youth, creating a distorted image of women. These videos encourage men to view women as sexual objects, entitled to offer themselves sexually to many men. They likewise encourage men to mistreat women sexually. Instead of learning what the pure and moral relationship between a man and a woman is from their parents or their school, the youth learn it from these deviant videos.

At one time people knew that one's home is a shelter and the street is dangerous. Now, the Internet has brought the street and its filth right into the home.

Moreover, social networks such as Facebook have also taken the home outside, spilling

the trash from one's home into the living room of another. The book Mesillat Yesharim warns us that the greatest moral danger is corrupt society (Chapter 5. See also The Vilna Gaon in his Igeret).

Our conclusion must be that we take the Internet and throw it out of our homes.

True, it has some good things in it, but it also has evil, and what we gain is worth far less than what we lose.

We managed throughout the generations without it, didn't we? True, it's got Torah lectures as well, but it's a source of sin, and you don't do a Mitzvah at the cost of committing a sin. Sexual license is not the only sin involved. There is also forbidden gossip, violence, insult and falsehood, not to mention the awful waste of time. True, theoretically speaking the Internet can bring a blessing. After all, G-d's ways are upright, the righteous follow those pathways and the wicked stumble on them. Here, however, we're not dealing with theory, but with the sad reality.

So, the best thing is to cut oneself off from this modern device. This is the ideal. Many people, however, need to use it for work, for study, etc. In that case, one has an outright obligation to use one of the filter programs, and, obviously, without the possibility of going around it.

There are various programs, each with its pluses and minuses.

-- Moreshet (with five levels).

-- Rimon, with its five levels: 1) Protected 2) Protected Plus 3) Protected Squared 4) Guarded and 5) Hermetically Sealed. Besides these options of Rimon, there is also Etrog, the most sealed of all.

-- Incognito.

-- Webchaver, in which every unconventional site visited is reported to a friend. That recalls the Talmud in Berachot: "Who sees me?"

-- There is also a simple solution: a password, half of which is known to one spouse and half to the other. Only with your spouse's knowledge can you thus access the internet.

Yet even all of this is not enough. All this is only a ruse. Amidst all of this, you need inner fortitude as well.

When the Vilna Gaon was going to set out onto street, he prepared himself psychologically by learning the four chapters of Mesillat Yescharim dealing with Zehirut - Caution, Chapter 2-5.

So everyone should write a summary appropriate to himself, and read it before he goes on the Internet - just like the officer who recites the same instructions each day before battle.

And indeed, this is a battle. It's war.

One should write himself a prayer before entering that battle: "G-d and G-d of our fathers, help me to remain pure."

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

"Mi She-Berach" for the sick

Q: How should the prayer "Mi She-Berach" for the sick be recited in Shul – by reciting each name aloud or by having each person say the name to themselves?

A: When one person says the "Mi She-berach" for the sick and everyone comes up and gives a name, this takes a lot of time and people do not listen – they chatter, etc. I have suggested that the person begin the prayer and then each person says the name or names to themselves. It is important to remember that this is not a magic prayer which forces Hashem to heal the sick. The Sefer Ha-Chinuch asks how we can pray at all and try to force Hashem to do something. He answers that we are not forcing Hashem; if He responds, it is because He is acting mercifully towards us. You cannot simply recite a formula – you have to pray and plead or perform an act for the person, such as giving Tzedakah. Repentance, prayer and Tzedakah remove the harsh decree.

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