

חיי שרה

WHY KETURA?

The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* III:51) states that Avraham's greatness stems from the fact that his life was driven primarily by his desire to beget generations that would revere Hashem. When Avraham complained to Hashem

מה תתן לי ואנכי הולך ערירי...הן לי לא נתתה זרע

...What will You give me, seeing I go childless... Behold, to me You have given no seed (*Bereishis* 15:2-3).

His intention was to inform Hashem that although he was blessed with many gifts, such as wealth, fame, and glory, there was no profit in any of them "if You will not give me children." More than anything else, Avraham wanted to perpetuate recognition of and love for Hashem. These are traits which, by personal example, he initiated and taught to his own generation and which he yearned to pass on to future generations. Hashem promised Avraham:

כי את כל הארץ אשר אתה ראה, לך אתננה, ולזרעך עד עולם

For all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever (*Bereishis* 13:15)

and again:

כי אם אשר יצא ממעיך, הוא יירשך

But he that shall come forth out of your own bowels shall be your heir (*ibid.* 15:4).

Hashem agreed that Avraham's seed would uphold His covenant:

ואתה את בריתי תשמר, אתה וזרעך אחריך לדורתם

And you shall keep My covenant; you and your seed after you, throughout their generations (*ibid.* 17:9).

This was understood to refer to circumcision (Rashi, *ibid.*). Even after Yishmael's birth, Hashem reassured Avraham:

ואת בריתי אקים את יצחק, אשר תלד לך שרה

But My covenant will I establish with Yitzchak, whom Sarah shall bear unto you (*ibid.* 17:21).

At the episode of the *Akeidah*, Avraham was again promised:

וירש זרעך את שער איביו, והתברכו בזרעך כל גווי הארץ

And your seed will possess the gate of his enemies, and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (ibid. 22: 17-18).

All of Avraham's dreams, aspirations and hopes were embodied in the person of Yitzchak, who represented the perpetuation of Avraham's way of life. In a sense, the culmination of Avraham's life-work was Yitzchak, who would make Avraham's endeavors his own. All this would ultimately result in a beloved multitude, all emulating the life-style of Avraham.

Avraham's full partner in serving as a role model for the future generations was Sarah. The *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 60:15)*, states that the home established by Avraham and Sarah was a resting place for the *Shechinah*. In fact, the *Beis Hamikdash* and its *keilim* (utensils) were fashioned to emulate the home and utensils of Avraham and Sarah. So spiritually rich were the seemingly mundane homes of our *Avos* and *Imahos*, that they served as the basis for the future sanctuary of *Klal Yisrael*.

The question that must be asked is, what did Avraham have in mind when he sought to remarry after the demise of Sarah (*Bereishis 25:1*)? Yitzchak, who merited holiness from the womb (Rashi, *Shabbos 137:*), was at this point already established as the spiritual and material heir to Avraham. The holy image of Sarah was imbued in her tent after her death. Although Avraham was aware of this miracle, he still did not make personal use of Sarah's tent and, moreover, did not bring his new bride there. Instead, Avraham bequeathed that particular tent to Yitzchak and Rivkah (*Zohar, Bereishis 25:5*). It seems that Avraham should have concentrated on the development of Yitzchak and Rivkah and their offspring. Why did he seek to marry someone who was not of the same caliber as Sarah, and moreover, why did he seek to father additional children with her?

Avraham's new wife, Ketura, was actually Hagar, whom Avraham had divorced at Sarah's command (*Targum Yonasan, Bereishis 25:1*). Hagar repented from her evil ways and embarked on the road to *teshuvah* (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 30*). Interestingly, the Ramban (*Bereishis 25:6*) contends that Ketura was not Hagar, but a mere Canaanite. Avraham, it seems, was vigilant in segregating the accursed Canaanite from the blessed Yisrael, only when a union might cause the holy seed of *Klal Yisrael* to emerge. Since it was already determined that the holy seed would emanate from Yitzchak, Avraham had to be restrictive with Yitzchak's potential mate. Avraham, at this point, however, was free to join with whomever he pleased, for in Yitzchak was contained the essence of holiness with which to establish the nation of Hashem. Once Avraham was assured that the *Am Hanivchar* was firmly rooted, he had no reservations in marrying even an accursed Canaanite. How is this to be understood; was Avraham so desperate for companionship?

The Ramban (ibid.) can be understood within the general context of the other commentaries. Hagar was actually an Egyptian, the daughter of the king of Egypt, given by her father to Sarah as a disciple. Her father exclaimed, "It is better that she serve as a servant in this house than be a princess in another house" (*Bereishis Rabbah 45:1*). Hagar also happened to be the granddaughter of Nimrod (*Targum Yonasan, Bereishis 16:5*). Hence, in effect, Hagar was also of the seed of Canaan. To understand Hagar it is imperative to first understand Eliezer, the disciple of Avraham (*Yoma 28:*). Eliezer was the son of Nimrod (*Targum Yonasan, Bereishis 14:14*) who had given Eliezer to Avraham as a gift. Eliezer possessed a holy soul, which was entangled in a web of

unholiness, spun by the children of *Cham* (*Seder Hadoros, Elef Hashlishi*: 8). This soul was waiting to be rescued by the fortuitous relationship with Avraham. Eliezer was not a servant in the conventional sense. He was actually Avraham's disciple who committed himself to his teacher in the fullest sense of the term. The Torah refers to Eliezer as "*Damesek Eliezer*" — "Eliezer of Damesek" (*Bereishis* 15:2). The *Gemara* interprets this to mean that:

דולה ומשקה מתורת רבו לאחרים

Eliezer drew from and provided (*shodolah umashkeh*) others with his master's teachings (*Yoma* 28:).

Avraham taught Torah to the men, while Sarah taught Torah to the women (*Bereishis Rabbah* 39:14). Avraham's chief teaching assistant was Damesek Eliezer. Due to faithful service to his master Avraham, Eliezer was able to escape the status of the accursed, and to attain the level of the blessed (*Zohar, Bereishis* 24:31). This is indicated by the prophetic utterance of Lavan:

בוא ברוך ה'

Come he who is blessed by Hashem (*Bereishis* 24:31).

Utilizing the system of:

למד סתום מן המפורש

Learn about what is hidden from that which is revealed (*Yoma* 59•),

we are able to extrapolate a history for Hagar which is similar to that of Eliezer. Hagar, like Eliezer, was the chief teaching assistant to Sarah. She grew in virtue and piety, emulating her mistress. The fact that Sarah offered Hagar to Avraham as a wife (*Bereishis* 16:2) attests to Hagar's elevated spiritual status. Sarah would not offer a "nobody" to her holy husband; Sarah was comfortable with the worthiness of Hagar (Rabbi Isaac Sher, *Leket Sichos Musar, Lech Lecha*). And Hagar, a product of the identical background as Eliezer, shared a parallel fate with her Uncle Eliezer. Hagar underwent the process of *teshuvah* and thereby also underwent a character change. The adoption of a new name, Ketura, implying that she was similar to a *Ketores*-offering to Hashem (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 30), is symbolic of her *teshuvah* and her new character (*Zohar, Bereishis* 25:1).

Avraham had children with Ketura because it was incumbent upon him to help populate the earth (Redak, *Bereishis* 25:1). Avraham was secure in the fact that the essence of *kedushah* handed down from father to son, initiated by Adam *Harishon*, was blossoming in Yitzchak. Nevertheless, as an adjunct to the *Am Hanivchar*, the world needs subordinate peoples. The ultimate fulfillment of mankind for the final *ge'ulah* requires the participation of all people: *Klal Yisrael* as the primary player with the other nations in supporting roles. For this reason, *Sheivet Dan* was invested with idolatry so that he could lead the other nations away from false gods at the time of the final redemption (see page 152). The *Beis Hamikdash* was established primarily for *Klal Yisrael*, but the participation of the other nations is welcome (*Melachim* I 8:41-43). The glory of Hashem is with *Klal Yisrael*, but the nations are granted a subordinate role.

To this day, the children of Ketura are responsible for performing *bris milah* (Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim* 10:8). The Rambam comes to this conclusion based on the fact that Ketura's

children were born after Avraham was charged with the *mitzvah* of *bris milah*, and that, in all likelihood, they themselves were circumcised at eight days of age.

Obviously, Avraham felt it necessary to bring additional children into this world in order to accomplish the ultimate *ge'ulah*. The question which must be addressed is, what relationship do the children of Ketura have with *Keneses Yisrael*?

The Maharsha (*Pesachim* 87:) reveals that exile for *Klal Yisrael* was never intended as a punishment. The *Gemara* states:

לא הגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא את ישראל לבין האומות, אלא כדי שיתוספו עליהם גרים
Hashem exiled Israel among the nations for the sole purpose of gaining converts
(*Pesachim* 87:).

Klal Yisrael was ordained to travel through the various countries of the world so that the few individual lofty souls present among the gentiles could be given the opportunity to join with *B'nei Yisrael*. Hence, Avraham's excursion into Egypt was intended to rescue the lofty soul of Hagar; while Yaakov's excursion into Egypt two generations later was designed to rescue the spiritual intelligentsia of Egypt, the *Eirev rav*; and similarly, Elimelech's exile to the land of Moav was planned by Hashem to rescue the great soul of Rus.

In addition, throughout history, Hashem has invited various prominent, previously wicked individuals to join *Klal Yisrael*. The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 96:) lists: Naaman, Nevuzaradon, the children of Sisera, the children of Sancheriv, and even the children of Haman, among others, who were invited to join with *Klal Yisrael*. The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains that all these individuals possessed a "superior power" which Hashem sought to incorporate into the Jewish people. Through *teshuvah* the evil was removed from these individuals, and they elevated themselves into *Klal Yisrael*.

Avraham is called by Hashem:

אב המון גוים נתתיך

I have made you the father of a multitude of nations (*Bereishis* 17:5).

Klal Yisrael was elevated from the ranks of the family of nations to a higher level of holiness, due to the virtues which our father Avraham passed along to his son Yitzchak. Built into our foundation was also the opportunity for the nations to become joined with us, through *geirus*. The reason Avraham had more children with Ketura, even after the dynastic establishment of Yitzchak, was "to increase his children in this world" (Redak, *Bereishis* 25:1). The children of Ketura are destined to lead the nations of the world in *teshuvah* so that ultimately all will join with *Klal Yisrael*.

In order to enable Yitzchak to attain the highest levels of excellence, it was imperative that he be free of all external trivialities, even benign and friendly relations. Complete excellence could only be achieved with complete isolation from the rest of the world, including friendly half-brothers. If Yitzchak and Rivkah were forced to deal with relatives, then all the effort, the caring and the considerations that would necessarily have to be exerted would have stymied their own growth. In order for *Klal Yisrael* to flourish, there must be separation from the rest of the world.

עם לבדד ישכן

A nation that dwells alone (*Bamidbar* 23:9).

Similarly, although Avraham's father Terach did *teshuvah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 38:12), it was still necessary for Avraham to eliminate all encumbrances. Terach set out for *Eretz Canaan*, from Ur Kasdim, together with Avraham (*Bereishis* 11:31). It was Terach's devout intention to settle with Avraham in *Eretz Canaan*, but the *Yad Hashem* saw to it that Terach got no further than Charan, and Avraham journeyed to *Eretz Canaan* without him (Rashi, Redak, Seforno, Chizkuni, *Bereishis* 11:32). Terach would have been too much of a distraction for Avraham. Likewise, the *Yad Hashem* had to separate Lot from Avraham (*Bereishis* 13:11), for Lot, too, at this juncture in time, proved too much of a detouring force in the spiritual development of Avraham.

It was with much distress and personal sacrifice that Avraham dismissed the children of Ketura. In relation to Lot's departure, the *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 41:7) interprets the verse:

ויסע לוט מקדם

and Lot journeyed from the east (*Bereishis* 13:11)

to mean:

הסיע עצמו מקדמונו של עולם

he removed himself from the One who preceded the world (*Bereishis Rabbah* 41:7).

Regarding the departure of the children of Ketura, the Torah uses a similar term:

קדמה, אל ארץ קדם

eastward, unto the east country (*Bereishis* 25:6).

Avraham knew that he was removing them from *kedushah*, but in order for *kedushah* to get a strong foothold in humanity, Yitzchak had to be left to develop on his own. In the future, the children of Ketura may rejoin their sibling via *geirus*. After Sarah's passing, marrying Ketura and having children with her was of singular importance to Avraham. The establishment of the *Am Hanivchar* was, as the Rambam states, the driving force in Avraham's life; but the spirituality of all humanity was also on Avraham's agenda. Avraham's greatest wish was for all of mankind to come together under the wings of *Keneses Yisrael*.

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