

A Taste of Torah Nurture Beyond Nature

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Mother, Ima, Mommy. These words are synonymous with nurture, warmth and love, that special bond between mother and child which is so unique and so very potent.

Yet when one thinks of the Matriarchs, Sara, Rivka, Rochel and Leah, a strange paradox occurs; these women were destined to be the mothers of our nation, yet each one was incapable of bearing children. It is difficult to understand why these great women were created totally unsuited to fulfill the very role which G-d intended for them.

This week's parsha begins with Yitzchok and Rivka sitting in opposite corners, each assailing the Heavens with their own fervent prayers and tears that they merit a natural miracle which would allow them to have children. The Gemara (Yevamos 64a) explains that this very scene is the reason and the explanation for the incongruity we just mentioned. While from a simplistic point of view it would seem that the reason they needed to pray was because they were not capable of having children, the Gemara states that the cause and effect were quite the contrary! Our Sages teach us that G-d desires the prayers of the righteous, and therefore created the Matriarchs in this fashion so that they would indeed beseech the One above with all their hearts for the blessing of children. In essence, they needed to be barren so that they would pray.

R' Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001) suggests a deeper meaning behind this extraordinary Gemara by drawing a parallel to the story of Chana. The Gemara (Berachos 31b) tells us that Chana, too, was barren for many years until finally her incessant, tearful

prayers for children were answered, and she gave birth to a child, Shmuel. Shortly thereafter, she gave him over to the tutelage of Eli HaKohen, the High Priest and leader of the Jewish People at the time. There followed an incident in which Shmuel was condemned to death by Eli HaKohen. Chana began to plead with Eli HaKohen to spare of the life of her son. Eli responded, "Allow justice to be done, and I, in turn, will pray that you be blessed with another son, even greater than Shmuel!" Chana replied, "No, it is for this child whom I have prayed!" The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, 1555-1631) explains that Chana told Eli that she would prefer the child for whom she had prayed over an even greater child. R' Pincus expands upon this, explaining that Chana understood that every single tear and every heartfelt prayer she had cried over those painful years hadn't been for naught; rather, each and every one had imbued and infused her child with an incomparable spirit of greatness. Essentially, Chana responded that a child with greater inherent potential could never compare to or replace the myriad impassioned prayers that had accrued on Shmuel's behalf.

R' Pincus further explains that G-d specifically wanted our forefathers to pray deeply and unabated for children so that their children would, in turn, embody the tremendous power of the prayers through which they came into being.

We, too, can tap into the incredible strength and potency of prayer! When we feel lost or lacking in any way, let us turn to the only One who can help us, the Almighty, and cry out in ardent prayer, and those very prayers shall stand by us forever.

Stories For The Soul

With All My Heart

Zevulun was a rich man who had inherited his wealth from his father. His father had been a great philanthropist, but Zevulun was a tight-fisted miser. Often solicitors would visit his mansion, beseeching him and his family for alms, only to be refused.

They were even stingy with their own meals. When petitioners would stand by the door during meal time, they would see the family eating the sparsest of meals, and never did they offer to share.

No, they never gave assistance to others - with one exception. Dov, a yeshiva student, refused to give up. He visited Zevulun every Chanuka. He and his friends would sing songs and dance and even play dreidel with Zevulun's family. Zevulun would give them a generous check for their yeshiva. As he would hand over the check, with trembling hands, he would say, "With all my heart."

One year, Dov and company arrived for their annual visit. Zevulun's teenage son was there. When Dov looked at the youth, his eyes almost popped out with disbelief. When the teenager saw Dov, he paled.

Dov volunteered for Tomchei Shabbos. He would prepare Shabbos meals for poor people, who would pick up their weekly package. Zevulun's teenage son was one of them.

Zevulun understood exactly what transpired. He explained, "My father had been very wealthy, but toward the end of his life he lost it all. We can barely afford food for the family."

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Kollel Happenings

DERECH HASHEM

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a philosophical series on "Derech Hashem," a sefer by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatoo. Discover and delve into the vital understanding of Hashem's world. The women's class is on Mondays at EDOS.



A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.



TRUST THY FATHER

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Trust thy Father," a series based on Chovos Ha'Levavos/Duties of the Heart. Discover and delve into vital Jewish concepts of Bitachon. The classes take place on Tuesdays, from 7:55-8:25 a.m. at Aish. For more info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues Safeguarding a Lost Object

If the finder cannot allay his suspicions of the claimant, he may not return the item to him without irrefutable proof, such as witnesses

who testify that the claim is true.. Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Wishing Well

Rivka from Maryland asked:

Is there anything wrong with making a wish and then throwing a coin into a wishing well?

Dear Rivka,

There are a number of possible scenarios; I will deal with two of them here. In the first one, a coin is thrown into a fountain or the like, but it will eventually be retrieved by someone and given to charity. In this case it would be permitted for a Jew to throw the coin and make a wish, provided of course that the wish is directed to G-d, asking Him to fulfill the wish. The Talmud states that it is permitted for a Jew to give charity and ask that such and such happen, because even if he is not granted his request from G-d he will not regret having given charity.

In the second scenario, the money is being thrown into a well, where it is irretrievable. I asked Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zt"l, a renowned Halachic

authority, and he told me that it would be forbidden in this case because it would be a waste of the coin, which violates the prohibition of bal tashchis.

The second scenario reminds me of a joke I once heard. Three men, one of whom was a Jew, were standing around the grave of a friend. According to the local custom, all the friends threw money into the grave so that the deceased would have money in the Hereafter. The grave was filled and the friends went off to have a drink in honor of their dear friend. While sipping their respective beverages, one of the friends announces "I threw in five hundred dollars!" The next friend, proudly exclaims, "I threw in a thousand dollars!" Looking meditatively into the distance, the Jewish friend says "I removed the five hundred dollars, and I removed the thousand dollars, and I left a check for twenty-five hundred."

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Stories for the Soul

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"Why don't you want anyone to know?" the yeshiva boys asked.

Because all we have left is our good name. If we lose that, we truly have nothing," said Zevulun. Then he handed Dov a check. "How can I accept this now, knowing that you can't afford it?" Dov asked. "You don't understand," said Zevulun. "This donation is the only dignity I have left. It gives me something to live for. Somehow, every year I manage to cover this check. I will continue to do so this year."

In this week's Parsha, the verse says, "And Esav said, 'Behold I am going to die, what good is a birthright to me?'" (Gen.25:32). Esav gave up hope and, as a result, made the worst decision of his life - to sell his birthright. We must never give up hope, for where there is hope there is life.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.