

The Weekly Haftarah

Shabbat Chayei Sarah – Melachim Aleph 1:1 – 1:31

In return for tearing off the corner of Shaul's robe, Dovid Hamelech was punished with always feeling cold. The Haftarah begins with the story of Dovid Hamelech being brought a beautiful woman named Avishag in order to warm him in his later years. Then, the Haftarah continues with one of Dovid Hamelech's sons, Adoniyahu trying to seize the throne away from his younger brother Shlomo. One of the wives of Dovid Hamelech, Batsheva, Shlomo's mother, and the prophet Natan, meet to discuss Adoniyahu's wish to become king. They decide to bring it to Dovid Hamelech's attention. Natan confirms to Dovid the news that Batsheva has told him regarding Adoniyahu's ambition. Batsheva pleads with Dovid Hamelech to fulfil his promise of her son Shlomo being heir to the throne. Dovid Hamelech assures her that he will rectify the situation, and promises to fulfil the promise that Shlomo will become king. And in fact, Shlomo was anointed soon after, even while Dovid Hamelech was alive.

These drastic measures reveal serious concern over Shlomo actually reigning. Further in this chapter it tells us that Dovid Hamelech's order to anoint Shlomo was met with great trepidation. B'nayahu, the presiding member of Sanhedrin responded and said, "Let it be Hashem's will that the mission is successful" (M'lachim 1:36). The Rabbis question the need for a blessing at this point. For it suggests that B'nayahu was uncertain of the mission's worthiness in Hashem's eyes. They question, "Didn't Hashem promise Dovid from the outset that Shlomo would be the next king?" Now that this prophecy was in the midst of fulfilment what could possibly affect it? They answer that although Hashem's original promise was but moments away from fulfilment, many impediments could

present themselves prior to its actual realisation (Bereshit Rabba 76:2).

These words teach us an important lesson about Divine providence. Although Shlomo's reign was pre-ordained and promised to Dovid Hamelech this did not guarantee its reality. Promises are given in accordance of the individual's worthiness and depend upon his maintaining standards of piety. The rabbis draw proof to this from Yaakov who was severely frightened. They explain that although Hashem promised earlier to protect Yaakov he did not feel secure. He was concerned that he may have unintentionally committed some fault and forfeited His protection. Apparently, Dovid Hamelech shared a similar concern that he may have forfeited some of his merits and no longer deserve that Shlomo be his successor. One can draw contrast with the opposite case of Moshe Rabbeinu being assured not to fear before the battle with Og. Rashi explains there that Moshe Rabbeinu was afraid that maybe Og's *zechut* of telling Avraham that Lot was in captivity would help Og win the battle.

Indeed, the Rabbis explain in this weeks sedra that Eliezer wanted his daughter to marry Yitzchak, but Avraham rejected it. We can see from here that Avraham did everything in his power to ensure that Yitzchak marry his pre-ordained spouse. Even though the marriage was decreed, this did not guarantee it would happen. Avraham therefore demanded from his servant a heavy oath in an attempt to secure his faithful commitment to his mission.

We learn from this the importance of capitalizing on our mitzvah opportunities.

Adapted from Torah.org and Haftorahman.com by a member of 'The Living Torah' Editorial team

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What Did Efron Do Wrong?

When studying the p'sukim of this week's sedra we notice that when Efron takes the money from Avraham Avinu his name is written without a 'vav'. Of course, our first instinct is to glance Rashi's way. Rashi gives us the famous p'shat of how Efron said a lot and didn't even do a little. This means that Efron took large coins that could be used as an international currency, rather than the standard smaller coins that were worth the same amount.

Obvious questions arise from this answer: The first being, why is this deserving of losing the 'vav'? A further question is; how does Rashi derive this idea about Efron saying a lot but not even doing little?

The following explanations are based on the Peirush of the Maharal – the Gur Aryeh.

He explains that Efron was lacking in human sensitivity and that he was using this as an opportunity to squeeze as much money as possible from Avraham.

A second answer is that the word Efron without the 'vav' has the gematria of 'Ra Aiyin', this is a hint to him being stingy and money hungry.

A question becomes apparent on this interpretation of the possuk. If the coins really had the same value whether big or small and the only difference was that the big ones were universal; how come this is considered to be such an iniquity that Efron deserved to lose a 'vav' from his name? Surely, accepting the small coins would have only helped Avraham fractionally?

We can answer this from a Gemara in Bava Metzia that says:

'Hama'amid Al Zuzi Nikra Ra Aiyin'

'Someone who is particular about money is called a Ra

Aiyin.'

The particularity of Efron was that he only accepted the big coins. Here by doing nothing to help Avraham and only accepting the big ones, he reveals his characteristic of being a Ra Aiyin and deserves to lose the 'vav'. He offers his field for free, but when Avraham is unyielding in his desire to pay, Efron charges an extortionate fee and refuses to accept small coins!

All this being said, it seems that Avraham gave the big coins entirely of his own accord and not because of Efron. It is unreasonable to suggest that Efron, having received big coins from Avraham, should have offered to exchange them for smaller coins. Realistically, only a Tzaddik would actualise ideals such as that!

Therefore we have to learn out an answer from the specific wording of the possuk. The possuk says, 'Eretz Arba Mei'os **Shekel Kesef**'. From the words Shekel Kesef, we can derive that Efron was really asking for big coins because if he was asking for small coins he would have said 'shekalim'.

A further understanding is that Avraham would not have given big coins because his wife had just passed away and such things are expensive. The search to gather these big coins would have taken time which might have led to Avraham leaving Sara's body overnight which is an *Issur*. This is a hint to the fact that Efron must have demanded the big coins and really deserved to be missing his 'vav'.

Written by Jonny Fishel

Acknowledged help from Mark Fishel

Words from the Wise

This week was the yahrtzeit of R'Yissachar Dov of Belz. He was one of the principal Chassidic Rebbes and led thousands of Chassidim during his 74 year lifetime.

In R'Yissachar's time, young adults would be conscripted into the army. The custom among Jews was to try to be exempted from being drafted into the army, which could have a devastating effect on a Jew's life, from anti-Semitism, non-kosher food and other difficulties.

Belzer Chassidim would ask their Rebbe to pray on their or on their son's behalf, the Rebbe would gladly oblige.

However, the story goes that when R'Yissachar's son Mordechai asked the Rebbe to pray for his exemption, R'Yissachar gave a long sigh.

His son and mother were extremely worried – surely R'Yissachar would not refuse his own son, surely he would not be sent into the harsh military world?

R'Yissachar's wife pleaded with her husband. "Hundreds of young men have been exempted and saved through your prayers. Why do you sigh when your son asks you the same favour? Surely you will also pray for your own son to be saved? Or perhaps, is it more difficult to pray for your son's exemption?"

R'Yissachar answered: "That is not the reason. I sighed because I was upset at my own reaction to Mordechai's request. When he told me he had been drafted I was extremely worried. I thought to myself that it was imperative that I try and pray for his exemption. Then I realised that it is just as important for the countless other young Jews to be exempted from army service. I sighed because I was worried that my concern for my son's plight was greater than that of the many young Jews needing my help."

Adapted from 'A Story A Day' by a Member of 'The Living Torah' Editorial Team

Riddle of the Week

The rishon of which sedra can be read 9 times a year? And under what circumstances?

Previous week:

Who was the mother of Avrohom Ovinu?

Answer:

אמתלאי בת כרנובו – (בבא בתרא צא.)

M'lachah of the Week

M'amer (Gathering) – Gathering stalks of grain to make a bundle of stalks. Included in the toldot are gathering fruit and putting figs or any natural products onto a stick, by piercing it, like in a kebab. It is rabbinically prohibited to gather even those objects which do not grow from the ground. But it is permitted to gather toys that were scattered in a room, because a new entity is not being created. It is also permitted to gather silverware, even though the metal comes from the ground, because it is in a processed state.

Source Aish.com

What's all the Fuss about Middos?

When Eliezer Eved Avraham is looking for a wife for Yitzchak, the criteria he chooses are really quite surprising. He doesn't look for wisdom or signs of wealth or some sort of stature in any way. He looks for one thing only – good 'middos', a refined character saturated with chessed, kindness.

The question this poses is obvious. Although clearly good middos are important, surely there are other vital qualities and characteristics essential to the complete 'ben Torah' without which real nearness to Hashem cannot be achieved?

The answer to this question can be found, surprisingly, in skyscrapers, or to be more precise, in what's underneath them.

The tallest 'occupied structure', that means one designed to be fully occupied for human use (as opposed to the CN tower for example), is the Petronas Towers Complex in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The visible height of the building is 452 metres. The *foundations beneath ground level* are 120 metres deep, more than a quarter of the visible height. The building above ground is magnificent and impressive, but without those foundations the whole thing would topple.

The message is clear. Although there may be visible characteristics of virtue and all that is good, without

the 'underpinning' of good 'middos', what you see cannot last. They are the pre-requisite for nearness to Hashem. This is also one of the reasons that in spite of their great importance there is not that much direct instruction in the Torah Shebichtav concerning 'middos'. They are the 'unseen obvious', as it were, on which excellence in all areas of greatness is built.

All the above doesn't only refer to 'regular' Sh'miras Hamitzvos and Ma'asim Tovim. Even in the area of success in Talmud Torah, 'Learning', you can only achieve real greatness on a foundation of Middos. What's the proof? This idea, I merited to hear from the mouth of my Rebbe, one of the G'dolei Olam, Rabeinu Yisroel Gustman z'tzl. He pointed out to us that when Chazal in Pirkei Avos tell us that there are forty eight ways to acquire Torah knowledge none of them have anything to do with 'kop', what we would call IQ. They're all about good middos and fine behaviour, **including 'bein adam l'chaveiro'**. It is a remarkable fact that there have been great Torah Sages that started off life in 'cheder', not just as average but were actually considered well below it! Their middos made them what they are. This is the key to success. We have to turn it!

Written by Rabbi A Lopian

Gematria of the Week

Throughout the Parsha, Efron is spelt with a ו, however, when he is actually selling the plot of land to Avrohom, the ו is missing. עפרן without a ו has a Gematria of 400, the same as רע ען. This is a hint to the fact that Efron was greedy, stingy and very particular when it came to monetary matters.

(בראשית כג:טז)