



Peculiar Pesukim

The Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashana recounts the events of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the quintessential demonstration of complete dedication on the part of a human being towards Hashem. It is a *zechut* that plays a primary role throughout the day, mentioned in our *tefillot* numerous times, and echoed in the blasts of the shofar as well. But the inclusion of the final section of the reading is puzzling and feels anticlimactic. *“It came to pass after these things, that Avraham was told, saying: Behold, Milcah too has borne children to Nachor your brother... and Betuel begot Rivka... And his concubine whose name was Reumah, also bore children: Tevach, Gaham, Tachash and Ma’achah.”* (*Bereisheet 22: 20-24*) What is the significance of these passages on the holiest of days?

Torah can be interpreted and understood on many levels. We can find allusions, teachings and deep insights in every word. In his commentary on the Rosh Hashana machzor, Rav Druck shares a powerful hint in the last *passuk* in the above passage to direct our thoughts during the Torah reading. *“Tachash”* is an acronym for *“tiku chodesh shofar,”* and *“Ma’achah”* is an acronym for *“meloch al kol haolam.”* As we read these names, we can concentrate

on the theme of shofar blowing to coronate Hashem as our King.

Rav Schwab in *Ma’ayan Beit Hasho’eva* sees these verses as conveying a message of awakening us to *teshuvah*. Rashi teaches that the sole purpose of this section is to inform us of Rivka’s birth. Yet there is no mention of her brother Lavan since the Torah does not acknowledge the wicked if there is no direct need. However, Lavan’s absence from the ultimate “Book of Life” should evoke thoughts of remorse as we ask ourselves, will we also, G-d forbid, be omitted from the book of life? Such thoughts and feelings will count as a merit to indeed be written in the *Sefer Hachaim*.

There is yet another pertinent message in this group of verses, says Rav Wolfson in *Emunat Itecha*. The Ba’al Shem Tov and his students emphasized complete focus on serving Hashem during the days of Rosh Hashana with trepidation and intensity. The Torah reading on the first day of Rosh Hashana is aimed toward those higher generations that were more adept at maintaining such an impassioned relationship with Hashem. But our reality is that we are not capable of such earnest, extended concentration. Thus, the reading for the second day concludes with the list of Nachor’s evil descendants paralleling

the evil and negativity that surround us from all sides. The first letters of the words “*U’Betuel yalad et Rivka,*” *aleph, vav, reish, yud,* spell the word “*ori.*” “*Hashem ori*”, our *avodah* for this time is about finding the goodness of Rivka, a moment of light, a spark of connection during these days that we can build on as we develop our service of Hashem in the coming year.

A final message is found in *Chumash Mesoret Harav*, based on the teachings of Rav Soloveitchik. The aforementioned section is not an ancillary addition to the *Akeidah*, it is part of the *nisayon* itself. Avraham Avinu who spread the word of Hashem, who is childless for 100 years, is asked to sacrifice his only child to Hashem. Contrast this with his brother, an idolator whose life is comfortable and has 12 children with ease. Avraham faced challenge after challenge yet remained steadfast in his values and beliefs, understanding that the service of Hashem is at times fraught with difficulty. Avraham Avinu accepted that his destiny and the destiny of his family would be one of adversity and he embraced it without question. This loyalty should inspire us on this holy day as we coronate Hashem as our King, recognizing His supreme dominion in every aspect of our lives. ■

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