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Rabbi Baruch Binyamin Hakohen Melman

*Parashat HaShavuah Series*

**Parashat Chayei Sarah: At Eventide**

Avraham's partner in kindness, Sarah, had just left the world. She lit the lamps of kindness in their home. Their home was the first *mishkan*, and in a sense she was the first *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest who lit the lamps each day in the future Holy Temple. As in the story of Chanukah, the lamp must be kept lit continuously.

Since his mother Sarah's passing, Yitzchak was now in deep pain. A holy spouse was needed to actively partner with him in bringing God's light into the world. In both senses – literally with light, and figuratively through kindness and compassion. She would be the lightkeeper.

Our tradition teaches how important it is to find a worthy spouse who is emblematic of the overarching qualities of kindness and compassion. One is allowed to even take leave of Eretz Yisrael if need be, so important is a worthy spouse. She would be a holy bride to fill the vacuum in his soul left by his mother Sarah's passing. She would bring a shining Light of *Chesed*, of kindness, to restore the light and lustre, indeed the holy joy that the family once knew.

But while Eliezer engaged in the physical effort to procure a spouse, the beneficiary of these efforts, Yitzhak himself had to desire it and pray for it to happen. And in fact he does pray, meditating in the field "towards evening." Note the common usage of the word "erev," or evening, in our narrative:

*"vayavrech hag'malim michutz la'ir el be'er hamayim Le'ET EREV, LE'ET tzeit hashoavot..."*

He (Eliezer) let the camels rest on their knees outside the city, beside the well; it was *at the time* of evening, *at the time* of the going out of the water-drawers (Gen 24:11).

Let us ask, why is the word ET (time) doubled: the "*time* of evening" and the "*time* of the going out of the water drawers?" If everybody knows that the time of drawing water is in the evening, then why repeat the phrase "in the evening?" That would verge on the redundant. As the Sages teach, no word in the Torah is extraneous!

The answer is in verse 63, where Yitzhak goes out to meditate in the field TOWARDS evening, i.e., *before* the evening. According to our narrative, Eliezer arrives at the evening. As it was his wont to pray *before* the evening, the text would suggest that Yitzhak's deep prayers had a remarkable and direct efficacy. Synchronicity. Hashem is called the "*bochen*

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*levavot*," the seer of the depths of our hearts' deepest desires. When hearts are united, prayer becomes stronger.

Indeed no two hearts were more united than Avraham's and Yitzhak's after the Akeidah. It was "*towards evening*" when the Akeidah occurred (it was clearly not dark yet because Avraham "saw the ram" in the thicket), and thus was now especially designated as the time of Yitzhak's deepest prayers. This was forever to be the time window that was uniquely his own, the most propitious and efficacious for all his future prayers. Mincha was *his* special time, his window to deep experiential happenings – his own "near death" experience, and his time of first meeting his future bride.

So just as Yitzchak was praying for his soulmate, so too was Eliezer praying that Yitzchak's soulmate should appear. *Erev* means "evening," but it also means "mixing." In the case of evening it is the "mixing" of light and darkness. Similarly, *areivut* (ERV) means "responsibility." The connection is that we – all Israel – are responsible for one another. But this idea of "*erev*," of the "mixing of the light" at eventide, the time of praying for one's soulmate, goes even deeper.

Eliezer has taken a journey out of Abraham's orbit, out of a place of pure light to a land of idolatry, to a place of spiritual darkness. But suddenly here was Rivka (Rebecca) engaged in acts of kindness, of *chesed*, to both man and "beast" (camels). To all living things. She is a light in the darkness. She is a light mixed in with the darkness – a mixing of the light and the darkness. She *is* *erev*.

And it is at that eventide moment that three things happen simultaneously, in perfect harmonic convergence: when she takes responsibility for her own kindness, when Eliezer takes responsibility for finding his master's son a soulmate, and when Yitzchak is praying for all of the above. Through prayer, cosmic forces become arrayed to synchronistically aid and abet spiritually ennobling aims.

Rivka in her own right represents the aspect of pure *chesed*. She is the opposite of Isaac's quality of *gevurah*, or restriction, thus renewing Abraham and Sarah's kindness paradigm. And we should be cognizant of the fact that we, *all of us*, as her children, are stamped with her seal of kindness. We are known as *Rachmanim B'nei Rachmanim* – Merciful Ones, Children of Merciful Ones. We are Children of the Light – the Light of Sarah's Tent.

But owing to the fervent and simultaneous prayers of all three – of Yitzchak, Eliezer and Rivka – we should also be known as the Children of the Evening. Both *erev* in the sense of evening as well as *erev* in the sense of *areivut* – pleasantness. And finally, it is in the sense of being responsible for one another, as in *kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* -- "all Israel are responsible one for the other."

There are those who take responsibility for the repair of their souls – their *innerworld* – and there are those who take responsibility for the repair of the cosmos – their *outerworld*. But here is the question: why can't we have both?

*Shabbat Shalom!*

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