

## “...That you not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites.” (24:3)

Avraham *Avinu* was adamant: Yitzchak was not to marry a girl from his Canaanite neighbors. Eliezer, Avraham's student, must go to Aram Naharaim to find Yitzchak's *bashert*, Heavenly-designated spouse. These two places had one thing in common: The people worshipped pagans. *Avodah zarah*, idol worship, was a way of life in both places. Therefore, what did Avraham gain by going elsewhere? At least, if Yitzchak's wife were to come from Canaan, Avraham would be acquainted with the family. *Kli Yakar* focuses on this question and presents us with an important explanation. He explains that there is another fear that concerned Avraham. The nature of parents is usually transmitted to their children. Some more – some less – but certain character traits are retained. If the parents had them, there is a strong likelihood that these character traits will be prevalent in their children. However, this is true only of those traits that are physical, human nature. For instance, if the father is an individual who is a glutton, morally deviate, envious, quick to anger, such behavior will likely be perpetuated by his offspring. Idol worship is a cerebral issue, dependent on a person's mind, his way of thinking, his intellect. An intellectual approach to life does not necessarily carry over from parent to child.

There are three partners in the creation of man: father, mother and Hashem. The **physical** aspects of the person are inherited from parents. The ability to think, believe, postulate, form an opinion – all matters of the **intellect** – are from Hashem. *Emunah*, faith, in Hashem is a function of the mind. Hashem grants each of us a *neshamah*, soul, and the ability to contemplate, muse, rationalize are all actions of the intellect. This is not passed on from parent to offspring.

This is why our Patriarch Avraham distanced himself from the *Canaanim*, who were morally corrupt and sinful. Idol worship, which was prevalent in Aram Naharaim, was sinful behavior, but it was of an intellectual nature. Just because the parents were idolaters was not an indication that the children would follow suit.

We now understand why Avraham sought a young woman whose *middos*, character traits, were impeccable. Intellectual deviation is the result of *middos raos*, negative character traits. One who does not believe does not want to believe. He is arrogant, weak and insecure, character traits that are the antithesis of trust. Avraham knew that if he would find a girl whose *middos* were exemplary, she would make the perfect life's partner for Yitzchak. Her positive *middos* would not allow her mind to become poisoned. It all depends on what one practices. Indeed, the *Minchas Chinuch* (15) writes that a wicked person who performs *mitzvos* all day – even though he does not perform them out of a sense of conviction – will eventually be *chozeir b'teshuvah*, repent and return to Hashem. In contrast, one who is a *tzaddik*, righteous person, yet becomes acclimated to *middos raos*, negative character traits, will regrettably discontinue his righteous practice and become a *rasha*, evil.

The significance of maintaining positive character traits cannot be emphasized enough. Two *bachurim*, potential students, presented themselves to the *Chasam Sofer* at his *yeshivah* in Pressburg, which at the time was the preeminent *yeshivah* in Hungary. This took place immediately after the *Yom Tov* of *Succos*. These two *bachurim* were different from one another. One possessed a brilliant mind, with an ability to grasp and analyze the material that was quite admirable. The other *bachur* was a fine, young man who applied himself diligently to his studies. However, he was not abundantly blessed with great acumen. Both were fine students, each in his own, individual manner. Yet, the *Chasam Sofer* accepted only one – the one whose aptitude was lacking. When queried concerning his decision, the *Chasam Sofer* explained, “When the *bachurim* came to the *Yeshivah*, it was immediately after *Succos*. Some of the leaves that had served as *schach*, covering on the *Succah*, had fallen to the ground. I noticed that the bright young man, whose brilliance should have been his entrance key to the *Yeshivah*, had no problem stepping on the leaves that had once been part of a *mitzvah*. The other student, although intellectually weaker, pushed the leaves aside and walked around them. He would not step on an object that had recently been a vital component of a *mitzvah*. I am not interested in accepting a student in my *yeshivah* who is not sensitive to the enduring sanctity of *mitzvos*.”

*Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, relates how a distinguished Bnei Brak family inculcated their children with positive character traits. Every Friday night, following the *Shabbos* meal, the children would gather at the table for *Oneg Shabbos* during which they would partake of some sweets, amid conversation and storytelling. During these sessions, every child was to relate a laudable action which had occurred in the home. The children basically stopped their rivalry. There was no discord, no fights; everyone got along. If each one had to relate a positive episode about his or her sibling, then they were always on the lookout for good things, positive activity. Unfortunately, this is not what is the norm in our contentiously-oriented society. This practice eventually extended to the children’s outlook on all people. They were always trying to find something positive to say about them.

Indeed, positive character traits and the performance of good deeds are what truly define a person. At the end of the day, one’s actions speak loudest. *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, Rav* of Vilna, came to visit *Horav Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, zl, Rav* of Lodz. *Rav* Chaim Ozer did not come empty-handed. He brought as a gift his brilliant *sefer*, *Achiezer*. The *Rav* of Lodz was very grateful and expressed his gratitude profoundly.

*Rav* Chaim Ozer asked, “When will his honor publish **his** *sefer*?” *Rav* Eliyahu Chaim replied, “Oh, but I do have a *sefer*.”

“I was unaware,” countered *Rav* Chaim Ozer. “May I see it?” he asked.

“Sure,” replied *Rav* Eliyahu Chaim. “Come with me.” The *Lodzer Rav* brought him over to a desk, opened the drawer, and showed him letters of credit, wherein he had undertaken to support a number of widows, orphans, and Torah scholars who were without ample means. “This is

**my sefer!** *Zeh sefer toldos Adam*, “This is the account (book) of the descendants/generations of man” (*Bereishis* 5:1). A person’s good deeds are his *sefer*. I am too busy with this *sefer* to author my novellae.”

*Rav* Chaim Ozer did not respond. A number of years later, when he was at death’s door, he intimated to *Horav Yosef Mishkovsky, zl*, that he now understands the profound words of the *Lodzer Rav*. The real “book” of man is comprised of his good deeds and character traits. This is what he brings with him to his eternal resting place.