

## That you not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among who I dwell. (24:3)

Avraham *Avinu* was adamant in insisting that Eliezer not take a wife for Yitzchak (*Avinu*) from the daughters of Canaan. He would rather that Eliezer travel to Charan, Avraham's birthplace, to seek a wife for Yitzchak. Being the *ben yachid*, only son, of Avraham and Sarah *Imeinu*, Yitzchak carried a tremendous legacy on his shoulders. The next generation which he, together with his future wife, would progenerate must be able to carry on the Abrahamitic way of life and its commitment to serving Hashem. To ensure this, Yitzchak could not marry just anyone. Avraham felt that the girls of Canaan were lacking, while Charan provided a better opportunity for finding the right girl. It is not as if the people of Charan were models of propriety. Lavan and his compatriots were idol worshippers. What made Avraham acquiesce to Charan over Canaan?

The simple explanation is that Avraham was a descendant of Shem *ben* Noach, while Canaan descended from Cham. Noach cursed Canaan. Why would Avraham want his son to marry into a family whom his great-grandfather had vilified? The **Derashos HaRan** offers what has become a well-known principle in Torah *hashkafa*, perspective/philosophy. Avraham rejected Canaan, as did his son Yitzchak, later in time when Yaakov (*Avinu*) left home to seek a wife, because the Canaanites possessed deficient *middos*, character traits. True, Lavan's people were idol worshippers, but this represented a shortcoming in their faith – not a deficiency in their character. Which is worse? One would think that an *apikores*, apostate, would be worse than one who is not a good person, a decent person, a man of character. Apparently, this is not true. A character deficiency is part and parcel of one's essence. His DNA is tainted by his blemished character traits. When something is a component of one's personality, it descends through the genes to the next generation. If the blemish is faith-based, an error in his religious thinking, it remains with him; it is not necessarily transmitted to the next generation.

The reason for the above is simple: man is a *baal bechirah*, has freedom of choice; as such, he is able to choose the path of faith with which he is comfortable. Thus, if a father chooses to become an apostate, this does not mandate his progeny to follow in his path. If the father is a *baal chesed*, kind, humane person, but an apostate, his son might very well be a wonderful, loving, kind *ben Torah!*

We now have two explanations concerning why Eliezer selected *chesed* as the barometer of acceptability for Yitzchak's bride. First, the Canaanites were a cursed people, and the blessed ones do not assimilate with those who are cursed. Second, the Canaanites had a character defect that would pass down to the next generation. In his inimitable manner, **Horav Pinchas Friedman, Shlita**, ties these two reasons together. We revert back to when Noach woke up from his stupor to discover what his son had done to him. Instead of cursing Cham, however, he seems to vent his anger on his grandson, Canaan! *Chazal* wonder: "Cham sinned, yet Canaan was cursed?" They explain that it was Canaan who saw Noach in his shameful state of inebriation, and, rather than

cover up his grandfather, he told his father, Cham, about Noach's debasement. Cham took the indignity to the next degree by making a public spectacle of his father.

Why did Noach curse Canaan when, in fact, it was Cham who was guilty of an egregious sin against him? Now, it all comes together. When Noach saw that Canaan exemplified the idea that the apple does not fall far from the tree, he understood that Cham's indiscretions were not faith issues, but rather, character deficiencies that had been passed down to his progeny. This deficiency was not going away. It would transfer from generation to generation, as the gene carrying the character deficiency would pass through the generations. An *arur* cannot marry a *baruch*, because the *arur* gene will keep on surfacing, thereby precluding the Canaanites as *mechutanim*, in-law partners, with Avraham.

Eliezer was acutely aware of Avraham's feelings. As such, he knew that he had to search for a girl whose *middos*, character traits, were exemplary. In *Pirkei Avos* 2:9, *Chazal* teach that a *lev tov*, good heart, encompasses within it all positive character traits. When a person possesses a good heart it indicates that all of the other positive attributes a person should have in order to be a *baal middos tovos* are an integral part of his character.

*Rav* Friedman applies the *chiddush*, novel idea rendered by the *Drashos HaRan*, as a means for explaining a statement made by Avraham *Avinu* and reiterated by Eliezer, concerning his negative feelings toward taking a girl from Canaan for Yitzchak. The Patriarch admonished Eliezer not to take a girl from Canaan – *Asher anochi yosheiv b'kirbo*, "Among who I dwell." Why did Avraham feel compelled to underscore the "*anochi*," "I," "among who I dwell?" Did the fact that he was their neighbor change their stripes? They were who they were, and that was reason enough to reject them as marriage partners.

The **Chasam Sofer** explains that Avraham intimated that perhaps, if he had not been living among them, the *shidduch*, match, could happen. The girl would have been compelled to leave her nefarious environment and live in Avraham's proximity. This would have inspired change that might have compensated for her murky origins. Now that Avraham lived among the Canaanites, the girl had never had the opportunity to leave her origins. Her inextricable bond with family, friends and culture had precluded any chance to better herself.

*Rav* Friedman suggests a homiletic reading of the *pasuk*, thereby availing us a window into Avraham's intention when he sought a wife for Yitzchak. *Chazal* teach that the husband/wife relationship works successfully when the *Shechinah* is a partner in the marriage. If their home is one which can serve as a place where the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence, can repose, then the relationship will succeed and flourish. The most important prerequisite for the Jewish home to be suitable for Hashem's Presence is *anavah*, lowliness, modesty, humility. Hashem ignored all the large, great mountains, and He gave the Torah on *Har Sinai*, the smallest mountain. The Almighty abhors arrogance. Therefore, if one is to determine the suitability of a young couple for marriage, the barometer should be their humility quotient. Two people that are humble, who never arrogate or

lord over one another, already possess the most important criteria for achieving a successful marriage.

When Yaakov *Avinu* came to the special place where he had his well-known dream, he remarked, *Achein yeish Hashem ba'makom hazeh, v'anochi lo yadaati*, "Surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know" (*Bereishis* 28:15). **Horav Mechel, zl, m'Zlotchav** explains this in the following manner: "Surely Hashem is in this place – (why) (This is because) *anochi lo yadaati*, 'The *anochi* – I, I did not know.'" The Patriarch intimated that, in order for Hashem's Presence to rest in a place, there has to be a *bitul*, abrogation, of the *anochi*, I. One must nullify "himself." Hashem only rests among the humble.

This, explains *Rav Friedman*, was Avraham's manner of preparing himself to speak with Hashem. He devoided the *anochi*, achieving true humility, so that he could be a footstool for the Almighty. Avraham referred to himself in the term, *v'anochi afar va'eifer*, "I am but dust and ashes." This means the *anochi* is mere dust and ashes. I have rid myself of the *anochi*.

We now have developed a new appreciation of Avraham's command to Eliezer not to take a wife from Canaan, *asher anochi yosheiv b'kirbo*. The people of Canaan are not *baalei middos tovos*. They have a character deficiency which is obvious from the fact that (their) *anochi* lives among them. They are filled with arrogance. Everything that they do is all about themselves. They are obsessed with their *anochi*. Such people will transmit their shortcomings to their progeny, since it is an inherent part of their Canaanite DNA.

We must remember that true humility does not mean lowering oneself, but rather, elevating others. When one learns to respect and admire, to appreciate the work and talent of others, he reflects true humility. One need not put himself down. Indeed, he should acknowledge and appreciate his own virtues and positive qualities, but, even more so, recognize the contributions of others. One grows when he learns from others. Only insecure people fail to recognize the talents and capabilities of others. We often mistake insecurity for humility. The insecure person has a serious problem which may well lead to arrogance. The humble person knows what he is – but he also recognizes the endowments and achievements of others. This is the primary ingredient in a successful marriage. Knowing that the wife with whom Yitzchak would share his life would be the next Matriarch of the Jewish People, he sought someone for whom *anochi* did not play a leading role. Rivkah *Imeinu* was the perfect match.