

Pondering the Parsha with Rabbi Jon Leener

Chaye Sarah

1) Genesis 24:61-67

Then Rebekah and her maids arose, mounted the camels, and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and went his way. Isaac had just come back from the vicinity of Beer-lahai-roi, for he was settled in the region of the Negeb. And Isaac went out walking (meaning of *lasuah* is uncertain; others translate as "to meditate") in the field toward evening and, looking up, he saw camels approaching. Raising her eyes, Rebekah saw Isaac. She alighted from the camel and said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field toward us?" And the servant said, "That is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.

וַתִּקְרָא רִבְקָה וַנַּעֲרֹתֶיהָ וַתֵּרָכְבּוּ
עַל־הַגְּמֵלִים וַתִּלְכְּנָה אַחֲרֵי הָאִישׁ וַיִּקְחָהּ
הָעֶבֶד אֶת־רִבְקָה וַיֵּלֶךְ: וַיִּצְחָק בְּנֵא מְבֹא
בְּאֵר לַחֵי רֹאִי וְהוּא יוֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַנֶּגֶב: וַיֵּצֵא
יִצְחָק לִשְׂוֹחַ בִּשְׂדֵה לַפְּנוֹת עֶרֶב וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו
וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה גְמֵלִים בָּאִים: וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה
אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא אֶת־יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל
הַגְּמֵל: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעֶבֶד מִי־הָאִישׁ הַלֵּזֶה
הַהֹלֵךְ בִּשְׂדֵה לְקִרְאָתָנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הָעֶבֶד הוּא
אֲדֹנִי וַתִּקְחָה הַצִּעִף וַתִּתְכַּס: וַיְסַפֵּר הָעֶבֶד
לְיִצְחָק אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
וַיְבָאָה יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקְחָהּ
אֶת־רִבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָה וַיִּנָּחֻם
יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:

Questions:

- Hagar lives in *Beer-lahai-roi*, why is that significant in understanding the larger narrative?
- Why did Rebekah fall off her camel when she first saw Isaac?
- What is the significance of Isaac being the first person in the Torah to "love" someone?
- The word "*lasuah*" has an uncertain meaning. Do you think it makes more sense to mean that Isaac was walking or meditating?

2) Tractate Brachot 26b

It has been stated: R. Jose son of R. Hanina said: The Tefillahs were instituted by the Patriarchs. R. Joshua b. Levi says: The Tefillahs were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices. It has been taught in accordance with R. Jose b. Hanina, and it has been taught in accordance with R. Joshua b. Levi. It has been taught in accordance with R. Jose b. Hanina: Abraham instituted the morning Tefillah, as it says, And Abraham got up early in the morning to the place where he had stood, and 'standing' means only prayer, as it says, Then stood up Phineas and prayed.

אֵיתָמַר, רַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא אָמַר:
תְּפִלּוֹת אֲבוֹת תְּקִנוּם. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי
אָמַר: תְּפִלּוֹת כִּנְגֵד תְּמִידִין תְּקִנוּם. תְּנִינָא
כוֹוֹתִיה דְּרַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא, וַתְּנִינָא
כוֹוֹתִיה דְּרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי. תְּנִינָא כוֹוֹתִיה
דְּרַבִּי יוֹסִי בְּרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: אֲבָרְהָם תִּקֵּן
תְּפִלַּת שַׁחֲרִית, שְׁנָאֵמַר: "וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבָרְהָם
בְּבֹקֶר אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם", וְאִין
"עָמַד" אֵלּא תְּפִלָּה, שְׁנָאֵמַר: "וַיַּעֲמַד
פִּינְחָס וַיִּפְלֵל".



2) Tractate Brachot 26b (Continued)

Isaac instituted the afternoon Tefillah, as it says, And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide, and 'meditation' means only prayer, as it says, A prayer of the afflicted when he fainteth and poureth out his meditation before the Lord. Jacob instituted the evening prayer, as it says, And he lighted upon the place and 'pegi'ah' means only prayer, as it says, Therefore pray not thou for this people neither lift up prayer nor cry for them, neither make intercession to Me.

יִצְחָק תִּקַּן תְּפִלַּת מִנְחָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "וַיֵּצֵא
יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה לִפְנוֹת עֶרֶב", וְאִין
"שִׁיחָה" אֵלּא תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "תְּפִלָּה
לְעַנִּי כִּי יִעֲטֹף וּלְפָנַי ה' יִשְׁפֹּךְ שִׁיחוֹ". יַעֲקֹב
תִּקַּן תְּפִלַּת עֶרְבִית, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּפְגַּע
בְּמָקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם", וְאִין "פְּגִיעָה" אֵלּא
תְּפִלָּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְאַתָּה אֵל תִּתְפַּלֵּל בְּעַד
הָעָם הַזֶּה וְאַל תִּשָּׂא בְּעַדָם רִנָּה וּתְפִלָּה
וְאַל תִּפְגַּע בִּי"

Questions:

→ For Abraham, prayer was standing, for Isaac, prayer was meditation, and for Jacob, it was an encounter — what verb would describe your most authentic form of prayer?

3) Tractate Pesachim 88a

And Rabbi Elazar said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And many peoples shall go and say: Go and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths" (Isaiah 2:3)? The Gemara notes that Jacob is the only Patriarch mentioned and asks: Is He the God of Jacob and not the God of Abraham and Isaac? Rather, the verse specifically mentions Jacob to allude to the fact that the Temple will ultimately be described in the same way that Jacob referred to it. It will not be referred to as it was referred to by Abraham. It is written of him that when he prayed at the location of the Temple mountain, he called it mount, as it is stated: "As it is said on this day: On the mount where the Lord is seen" (Genesis 22:14). And it will not be referred to as it was referred to by Isaac. It is written of him that he called the location of the Temple field when he prayed there, as it is stated: "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field" (Genesis 24:63). Rather, it will be described as it was referred to by Jacob, who called it house, as it is stated: "And he called the name of that place Beth-El" (Genesis 28:19), which means house of God.

וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר, מֵאֵי
דְּכָתִיב: "וְהָלְכוּ עַמִּים
רַבִּים וְאָמְרוּ לָכּוּ וְנַעֲלֶה אֶל
הָרֵ ה' אֶל בֵּית אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
וְגו'". אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב, וְלֹא
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק?
אֵלּא, לֹא כְּאַבְרָהָם שֶׁכָּתוּב
בּו "הָר", שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֲשֶׁר
יֹאמַר הַיּוֹם בְּהָרֵ ה' יִרְאֶה",
וְלֹא כְּיִצְחָק שֶׁכָּתוּב בּו
"שָׂדֶה", שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֵּצֵא
יִצְחָק לְשׁוּחַ בַּשָּׂדֶה", אֵלּא
כְּיַעֲקֹב שֶׁקָּרָא "בֵּית",
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שֵׁם
הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא בֵּית אֵל"

Questions:

- How do you understand this text compared to the previous one?
- How is Abraham's life or personality like a mountain? What about Isaac as a field? Jacob as a home?



4) Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev on Pesachim 88 (above)

The Talmud Pesachim 88 draws attention to Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov each using a different simile when trying to condense their concept of God. Avraham saw God in terms of a **הר**, "mountain," i.e. something far above our level towering above man. Yitzchok perceived him as **שדה**, a field, covering huge expanses of earth, but sharing earth with man. Yaakov perceived Him as **בית**, i.e. an intimate term, viewing God as if He were at home with human beings. A major difference between Yaakov's concept of God and that of his forefathers, is that the former did not view God as being "at home" permanently on earth, whereas Yaakov did perceive Him as constantly accompanying man, much as a house is the symbol of a permanent presence.

והענין, כי שדה אין בו דירת קבע ופשיטא בהר אכן בבית ודאי דירת קבע הוא. והנה יש שלש מדות יראה אהבה והתפארות הבורא. והנה קודם שהיה להשכינה דירת קבע בארץ לא היה להג' מדות הנ"ל גם כן מקום שיבואו לארץ. ולזאת אמר וירא והנה באר בשדה, שנקראת עדיין שדה בלא קביעות. והנה ג' עדרי צאן רובצים, מלשון האם רובצת על האפרוחים (דברים כב, ו) כי לא היה השכינה עדיין בארץ. והטעם והאבן גדולה על פי הבאר, רצה לומר האבן הקליפה שעדיין שולטת. ולזה ויגש יעקב ויגל את האבן מעל פי הבאר ויקרא את שמו בית אל, והבן:

Questions:

→ What sort of location/place would best reflect your concept of God? Does it remain the same or change?