



PARSHAS CHAYEI SARAH – SHLOMO STAHL

Soro has just died and been buried and immediately Avrohom instructs his faithful servant – “Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites amongst whom I dwell (Bekirbo). Rather go to my land and to my birthplace”.

Why? If he was worried that the Canaanim were idol-worshippers, were the Aramean people not equally idol-worshippers - as Yehoshua said (Yehoshua 24, 2 and we quote it in the Hagadda) “Your forefathers dwelled across the river - Terach the father of Avraham and the father of Nachor - and they served other gods”?

The Ran explains in his D’roshos¹ that there are two types of Aveiros (and Mitzvos). There are those that affect a person’s character, and those that do not. Those that do are then passed on to children by nature in the form of bad character traits, eg anger, hatred, taking revenge, cruelty, miserliness, and a lack of ethics, morality and modesty. However, incorrect beliefs do not affect a person’s nature. Whilst parents may teach their children idolatry, this is just an intellectual deviation, which can be corrected. Avrohom must have known that, whilst the people of Aram were idolatrous, their basic Middos were good. Unlike the Kenaanim, of whom the Torah says, when introducing the forbidden marriages (Vayikra18,3):

“Do not follow the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you; and do not follow their traditions. Whereupon Rashi says - The deeds of the Canaanites (and the Egyptians) were the most abominable of all the nations.

However this does not explain why was he not happy that Yitzchok should marry the daughters of Aner Eshkol and Mamrei, who, being covenant partners of Avrohom, presumably were better people

Horav S R Hirsch, who was fighting the 19th century assimilation, takes his cue from the words “amongst whom I dwell”. If Yitzchok were to marry a local girl then there would be influence from all her family and friends. Were she to come from a far off place this influence would be avoided. Naturally too, if she were far away from her home she was more likely to adapt to Avrohom’s household, whereas were Yitzchok to travel there it was more likely that he would blend into hers. Moreover, Avrohom wanted that she leave her family and friends behind and that she come towards Yitzchok – not only physically, but also metaphorically – that she breaks away from her past and adopts the Abrahmic culture – in the same manner that Avraham himself went away from his land and his family². Avrohom therefore forbade outright that, Yitzchok be taken there.

This is why Eliezer very delicately changed the words *bekirbo* to *be’arzo*. *Bekirbo* would have been offensive. Do not take a wife from the people amongst whom I live implying that had he lived amongst you he would not have you either. (This is too why Avrohom used a double expression “for my son, for Yitzchok” – besides that she must obviously be suitable for Yitzchok, she must be suitable for *my* son – ie the son of the Abrahmic outlook.) (Hirsch)

“.....and were the woman not to agree, you, Eliezer, will be free of this oath”. Rashi explains that Eliezer may then choose a woman from Aner Eshkol and Mamrei. However, following rationale above, the Ramban’s explanation is more satisfying. You will be absolved from the oath, your mission is over – so what will be with Yitzchok? – There is no room for compromise. Hashem will do what is good in his eyes. When all human endeavour fails we can do no more but put our trust entirely in Divine Providence.

Perhaps this explains Avrohom’s introduction to the oath: “Swear to me by Hashem, the G-d of the heaven and the G-d of the earth. Hashem, whom we think of as being in heaven; He runs and directs the world, and will somehow resolve this. (Hirsch, unlike Rashi?) Or perhaps he was reassuring Eliezer that his mission would indeed meet with success. (Artscroll Stone Chumash)

¹ Quoted by Malbim, and précised in Artscroll Stone & by R’ Eli Munk “The Call of the Torah”

² Rabbi Eli Munk “The Call of the Torah