

This week's *Parashah* opens with Avraham's purchase of the *Me'arat Ha'machpelah* from Efron the Hittite. The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 87a) contrasts Avraham and Efron. The latter said (at the beginning of last week's *Parashah*), "I will fetch a morsel of bread," but he actually served his guests cream and milk and a tender calf. In short, Avraham embodied the statement: "Tzaddikim say little and do a lot." In contrast, Efron offered to give Avraham the *Me'arat Ha'machpelah* for free but, in the end, he demanded 400 of the highest quality silver coins. Thus, Efron embodied: "Resha'im say a lot and do little."

R' Uri Weisblum *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Nachalat Ha'levi'im in Haifa, Israel) writes: When our Sages praise the righteous for saying little and doing a lot, the emphasis is not on the fact that they keep their word and do even more than they promised. Rather, it is on the fact that they speak only when and to the extent necessary. Speech, explains R' Weisblum, is the defining characteristic of a human being and is how the soul interacts with the physical world (see *Onkelos to Bereishit* 2:7). Accordingly, speech should be used with care--not like the wicked who enjoy hearing the sound of their own voices or who, like Efron, use speech solely to bring honor to themselves.

R' Weisblum elaborates: The Torah describes Efron's offer to give Avraham the *Me'arat Ha'machpelah* as follows (23:10), "Efron the Hittite responded to Avraham in the hearing of the children of Chet, for all who come to the gate of his city, saying . . ." Efron's offer was not sincere; he was speaking for public consumption. – *Continued in box inside* –

Shabbat

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) writes: The *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat* reminds us that the world was created from nothing, and that everything was made in six days and *Hashem* ceased to create on the seventh day. Perhaps this is what the Torah means when it says (*Shmot* 31:17), "Between Me and *Bnei Yisrael* it is a sign *Le'olam* (literally, 'for the world')"--i.e., a sign that the world was created [rather than having existed forever]. The verse elaborates, "In a six-day period *Hashem* made heaven and earth . . ."

R' Bachya continues: Because *Shabbat* is a testament to *Hashem's* creation of the world, we are commanded to remember it every day. We do this by referring to the days of the week as: "The first day," "the second day," etc., not giving each day its own name, as other nations do. This is the meaning of the verse (*Shmot* 20:8), "Remember the *Shabbat* day to sanctify it"--i.e., we sanctify it by remembering it every day.

R' Bachya writes further: We read (*Yeshayah* 58:13), "If you proclaim the *Shabbat* an '*Oneg*' / 'delight' . . ." We are commanded to enjoy *Shabbat* with food and drink more so than on other days, because, in this way, we highlight *Shabbat's* uniqueness and elevate it above all other days. Doing so will remind us about Creation and leads us to give thanks to *Hashem* for creating the world from nothing. Then, both our bodies and our souls will have *Oneg Shabbat*: our bodies, from the food, and our souls, from remembering *Hashem's* deeds and wonders. In addition, R' Bachya adds, our souls will have *Oneg* in the World-to-Come as the true reward for proper observance of *Shabbat*. (*Kad Ha'kemach*)

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“It was, when the camels had finished drinking, the man took a golden nose ring, its weight was a *Beka*, and two bracelets on her arms, ten gold shekels was their weight.” (24:22)

Why did Eliezer wait until the camels had finished drinking before giving Rivka these gifts? R’ Shimshon Dovid Pincus z”l (1944-2001; rabbi of Ofakim, Israel) answers: Eliezer waited to see whether, after performing an incredible act of kindness, Rivka would wait for payment, or at least a compliment. But she did not; she turned around to leave as if she had done nothing remarkable. Then Eliezer knew that she was truly remarkable, so he gave her the gifts. *(Tiferet Shimshon)*

– Continued from front page –

In contrast, a righteous person’s care with speech is illustrated later in our *Parashah*, where we read regarding Rivka (24:18-19), “She said, ‘Drink, my lord,’ and quickly she lowered her jug to her hand and gave him to drink. When she finished giving him to drink, she said, ‘I will draw water even for your camels until they have finished drinking.’” When Eliezer retells the chain of events, he misquotes Rivka as saying (24:46), “Drink, and I will even water your camels.” R’ Weisblum explains: Rivka did not mention watering the camels until Eliezer and his men had finished drinking, for there was no purpose in offering that additional kindness when she was busy with the first kindness and unavailable to perform the second one. Eliezer missed that subtlety, however, and merged Rivka’s two statements into one.

Later still in the *Parashah*, we again see how the wicked speak. We read (24:50-51), “Then Lavan and Betuel answered and said, ‘The matter stemmed from *Hashem*! We can say to you neither bad nor good. Here, Rivka is before you; take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master’s son as *Hashem* has spoken.’” Despite that very clear recognition of *Hashem*’s Will, Rivka’s family did an about-face the very next morning (24:55), “Let the maiden remain with us a year or ten [months]; then she will go.” Such is the way of the wicked. *(He’arat Ha’derech p.315)*

Shlomo *Ha’melech* teaches (*Mishlei* 17:27), “One who is sparing with his words knows knowledge, and a man of understanding speaks sparingly.” R’ Yehuda Loewe z”l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) writes: Shlomo *Ha’melech* is not saying that a person should never speak. Rather, he is saying that silence is preferable when there is no need to talk. Nevertheless, *Maharal* adds, our Sages agree that total silence is undesirable, for man is meant to be a social creature. It is excessive speech that is not only undesirable, but *Halachically* prohibited.

(Netiv Ha’shetikah ch.1)

“Sarah died . . .” (23:2)

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b) states: “The death of the righteous is on par with the burning of the *Bet Hamikdash*.”

R’ Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z”l (1910-1995; leading *Halachic* authority and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) said in a eulogy: We have been mourning for the *Bet Hamikdash* for 2,000 years, whereas the mourning period for a person--even a *Tzaddik*--is limited to 12 months. Perhaps we mourn less for a *Tzaddik* because of the Torah’s promise (*Devarim* 31:21), “[The Torah] shall not be forgotten from the mouth of [*Yisrael*’s] offspring.” Moreover, our Sages comment on the verse (*Kohelet* 1:5), “The sun rises and the sun sets,” that a *Tzaddik* does not pass away until his replacement is born. Thus, the Jewish People are never “orphaned.” At the same time, R’ Auerbach said, we see how crucial Torah is to the Jewish People: We have lived 2,000 years with no *Bet Hamikdash*, but *Hashem* has promised that we will never be without Torah scholars and righteous people, for we cannot live even a day without them.

(Halichot Shlomo: Tishrei-Adar p.40 fn.3)

“My lord, heed me! Land worth four hundred silver *Shekels*; between me and you -- what is it? Bury your dead.” (23:15)

Our Sages say that Efron demanded an exorbitant price for the *Me’arat Ha’machpelah*. R’ Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky z”l (1899-1985; known as the *Steipler Gaon*) writes: We read about Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishit* 33:19), “He bought the parcel of land upon which he pitched his tent from the children of Chamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred *Kesitah*.” One hundred *Kesitah* equals five *Shekalim*. Since the Torah uses the word “field” both in our *Parashah* and in Yaakov’s case without defining the size of the field, we can presume that they were of approximately equal size. Nevertheless, Efron demanded 400 *Shekel* for his field--eighty times more than Yaakov would later pay for a field.

(Birkat Peretz)

“Now the maiden was very fair to look upon . . . She descended to the spring, filled her jug and ascended. The slave [Eliezer] ran towards her . . .” (24:16-17)

R’ Avigdor Tzarfati z”l (France; 13th century) writes: Eliezer made up his mind about the Rivka immediately. From here we learn that it is sufficient when evaluating a *Shidduch* / match to know that the girl is healthy [Rivka filled the jug and carried it up from the well] and has good *Middot*. It does not matter if her family is not particularly fine, as Rivka’s was not; provided, of course, that the family is not one with which a match is prohibited or discouraged by *Halachah*.

(Peirushim U’pesakim Le’rabbeinu Avigdor Tzarfati)