

The Parsha Discussion

TORAH TO DISCUSS WITH TEENS AND ADULTS AROUND YOUR SHABBAT TABLE

Chaye Sarah: Sarah's Tent

When Isaac marries Rebecca, we read this interesting passuk:

“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah, and she was his wife. He loved her, and Isaac found comfort after his mother’s [death].” (24:67)

וַיְבִיֵאֵהוּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רֵבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ
לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאֱהָבֶהּ וַיִּנְחָם יִצְחָק אֶחָרֵי אִמּוֹ:



This verse teaches us that Isaac’s relationship with Rebecca is one of love. Additionally, we hear how their marriage offers Isaac a sense of closure, relief, and healing for the pain and loneliness that he has experienced since his mother’s passing, three years earlier. But why does the text mention that “Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah”? Why is this detail relevant? Rashi comments (based upon Midrash Bereshit Rabba):

הָאֵלֶּלֶה שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ. וַיְבִיֵאֵהוּ הָאֵלֶּלֶה וְנִעֲשִׂית דְּגַמַּת שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, כְּלוּמַר וְהָרִי הִיא שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ, שְׂכָל זְמַן שֶׁשָּׂרָה
קִיַּמַת הָיָה נֵר דְּלוּק מְעַרְב שֶׁבֶת לְעַרְב שֶׁבֶת וּבְרַכָּה מְצוּיָה בְּעֵסָה וְעַנֵּן קָשׁוּר עַל הָאֵהָל, וּמִשְׁמַתָּה פְּסִיקוֹ,
וְכִשְׁבָּאת רֵבְקָה חֲזָרוּ:

INTO HIS MOTHER SARAH’S TENT — He brought her into the tent, and she became the image of his mother Sarah ... For whilst Sarah was living, she had a light burning from one Sabbath eve to the next, there was always a blessing in the dough and a cloud was “tied” above the tent, but since her death all these had stopped. When Rebecca came, they reappeared.

The Midrash suggests that there was something special about Rebecca’s entry into his mother’s tent that allowed Isaac to proceed and marry Rebecca. Moreover, this very feature mirrored his mother Sarah, and as such, it offered solace and comfort to Isaac.

Three features are noted:

1. A light lit from Shabbat to Shabbat
2. Blessing in the dough
3. A cloud above the tent

What do these three signs represent?

APPROACH 1: The Mishkan

One way to understand this Midrash is that it is drawing parallel lines to the Tabernacle. There, in the “tent” that we call the Mishkan, we recognize precisely these three features:

- A cloud manifest above the tent. (See Ex. 40:34; Num 10:15-16; 14:14)
- The candles of the Menorah burned constantly. (Ex 27:20)
- The Shewbread was eaten after 7 days (Lev ch.24). The bread must have had a “blessing” for it to remain fresh.

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If this is the intent of the Midrash, then it seeks to transmit the idea that both Sarah, and Rebecca too invested their home with the holiness of the Mishkan, making it into a tent in which the divine presence could be manifest.

APPROACH 2: A Jewish home

My teacher, Rabbi Yehudah Amital, suggested a different interpretation¹. These three features are in fact, characteristics of a Jewish home:

A light from Shabbat to Shabbat – Some people are “Shabbat-Jews”; on Shabbat they pary, on Shabbat they study Torah, on Shabbat they recite blessings. However, spirituality must be in a Jewish home not only on Shabbat but each and every day of the week. The “light” must be “lit” from Sabbath to Sabbath, making a religious effort, and offering religious inspiration, all week long.

Blessing in the dough – relates to the mitzva of hospitality, of welcoming and hosting guests. Some homes refrain from inviting guests because they are concerned that there will not be enough food for guests, or that the conditions will not be pristine and perfect for the visitors; but other homes welcome visitors with joy, and though the food is not plentiful, the family’s delight in the experience of welcoming guests means that everyone leaves happy. The quality of “blessing in the dough” is an attitude, a spirit of sharing and a willingness to have the home serve as a means to provide for others.

A cloud tied to the Tent – symbolises spiritual aspirations that go beyond the home itself. One needs to foster spiritual goals and ambitions beyond the home, beyond the needs of here and now, beyond the chores and daily duties. What spiritual dreams and goals do you have?

So let’s discuss at the table:

- What does it mean for a home to resemble the Tabernacle?
- But it seems inconsonant: The Tabernacle is an elevated, sacred domain; A home is an environment in which to live. What could the Midrash mean?

Rav Amital suggests that we have a “light from Shabbat to Shabbat” – that we infuse our week with elements of Judaism and spirituality.

- What could you add to your week that might make Judaism more present in your every day?
How could you make your weekdays more engaged with Judaism?

Shabbat Shalom!

¹ Seuda Shelishit. Chaye Sarah 5753