

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Chayei Sarah 5785

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Avraham sends a special messenger to find a wife for his son, Yitzchok.

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-עֲבָדָיו זָקֵן בֵּיתוֹ הַמִּזְשֵׁל בְּכָל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ שְׂיָמֵנָא יְדָהּ תַּחַת יָרְכִי:

“And Avraham said to his servant, the eldest of his household, the authorized person of all that was his, ‘Give me your hand, please, in lieu of my loins.’” (Bereishis 24:2).

Who was this special servant that Avraham give his authority and trust to? How do we identify him from the wording? What is this special handshake and terms of promise?

An obvious choice for the “servant, eldest of the household” would be Eliezer. Eliezer is named one time in the entire Torah (not including Moshe’s son). Prior to Avraham having any children he thought that his top servant would inherit him. After that, Eliezer seems to disappear from the narrative. Yishmael was Avraham’s “eldest son.” However, what happened to Yishmael between him being sent out of Avraham’s household – at sixteen – and he coming to bury Avraham? Also, was Yishmael a servant and the correct person to be the authority over all of Avraham’s possessions?

Yishmael is kicked out of Avraham’s household twice. First in utero after Hagar was with child and she started to look down upon Sarah. Hagar was clearly Sarah’s maidservant. (Ibid 16:2). Sarah, having no children, wanted to be built up through her maidservant. Her maidservant would have a child that would really be Sarah’s. This is the same that Bilah and Zilpah did for Leah and Rochel. However, Sarah could not tolerate Hagar’s behavior so she made life difficult for her, to show who was master. (Ibid 16:6). Hagar left and was promised, famously, that she would have a son וְהָיָא יְהִיָּה פֶּרָא אָדָם “And he shall be a wild fruitful person, his hand will be in all, and hand will be everything to him; and he shall neighbor upon the face of all his brethren.” (Ibid 16:12). Most interpret פֶּרָא אָדָם perah adam as wild-donkey of a man, or similar. However, the word perah is the root of fruitful. The Torah promises that Yishmael will be fruitful many times. “As for Yishmael, I have heard you and behold, I have blessed him and have made him fruitful.” (Ibid 17:20). The Torah uses the word וְהִפְרִיתִי hifraisi, with the root pera. He will become the father of twelve princes. (Ibid). Hashem again promises Avraham that Yishmael will become a nation. (Ibid 21:13). And again, Hashem promises Hagar that Yishmael will be a great nation. (Ibid 21:18).

Hagar returned, Yishmael was born, and Avram named him Yishmael. (16:15). Hashem again promised Avraham (also changing his name) he was to be the father of many nations and says it will not be through Yishmael. (Ibid 17:19).

Being the son of a maidservant, Yishmael should be a servant himself. However, he was born to build up Sarah so he obtained the status of a son. Avraham circumcised Yishmael. (17:26). The Torah calls him his “son.” (Ibid). After Yitzchok was born, Sarah no longer saw Yishmael as a son. He was “the son that Hagar bore through Avraham.”

(Ibid 21:9). Avraham cast Hagar and Yishmael away. (Ibid 21:14). Hashem says it will be Yitzchok that will inherit Avraham. (Ibid 21:12). Yishmael no longer had “son” status.

Yishmael returned to Avraham by the akaidas Yitzchok, the marking of Yitzchok. The Torah calls Yishmael a naar. (Ibid 21:18). The word נַעַר often is translated as youth. While it literally means youth, it means attendant in the Chumash. Yoseph (ibid 37:2) and Aharon (Shmos 2:6) are both called naar, attendant. The pasuk says “And the Lord heard the voice of the attendant.” (Bereishis 21:17). Later, it was the daughter of Pharaoh who heard “the cry of the attendant” and took pity on the child in the basket. (Shmos 2:6). Yishmael is referred to as the attendant, again, as Avraham approached the place that he built a mizbeach. (Bereishis 22:5). “And Avraham said to the two youths, return for yourselves with the donkey, and I and my attendant shall go until there, and we shall prostrate and will return to you.” (Ibid). Avraham was telling his servants that Yishmael (the attendant) will come with him to daven to Hashem. They both would return – because it was Yitzchok that may be marked for offering. Yitzchok came to meet Avraham from a different location. (See 22:19 where Avraham (not Yitzchok) returned to Beer Sheva; and 24:62 where Yitzchok returned from the south, where he lived). Yishmael returned to Avraham years after ejection, and returned as Avraham’s servant. He returned on condition to look after the interests of Yitzchok.

Only two people swore by handshake in lieu of their loins. The word in the Torah תַּחַשׁ tachas means instead of. Avraham asked for a handshake in lieu of the loins, that were already circumcised. Circumcision signified a covenant. Yaakov asked the same of Yosef, later. (Ibid 47:29). Yishmael had a mila. (Ibid 17:26). However, so did all of Avraham’s household servants. (Ibid 17:27). Thus, it still could be Eliezer as “attendant” and servant, eldest of his household. However, the oath Avraham makes the servant swear is telling. Avraham says that a messenger of Hashem will go with the servant. (Ibid 24:7). Yishmael already had two encounters with malachei Hashem (the two times Hagar was cast away). Further, Avraham goes into this entire monologue of “Hashem, the Lord of the heavens, that took me from my father’s house...and swore to give the Land to my offspring.” (Ibid). It was as if Avraham was reiterating, to my offspring – Yitzchok – not to you. Otherwise, such strong language was unnecessary. If the servant was unsuccessful then he would be free of the oath. (Ibid 24:8). Instead of doing the minimum, the servant took camels and bounty and did everything he can to fulfill the oath. (Ibid 24:10). After saying he could be free if the mission failed (ibid 24:41) he begged Hashem (ibid 24:42) to be successful. Why would a servant go to great bounds to be successful when he could be free? Yishmael did it because he knew the blessings that he would become the father of twelve princes and a great nation would only be fulfilled if he earned status as Avraham’s son again. The blessing was tied to Avraham. When he was cast out, he was in danger of losing those brochos. He told Besuel and Lavan “shall I turn right or left?” (Ibid 24:49). Will I be a free man or will I be the father of a nation? He bowed to Hashem upon hearing his success (and future success). (Ibid 24:52). He called Yitzchok his master (ibid 24:65) because he promised to look out for Yitzchok. That is how Yishmael came back to Avraham and earned his brochos.