

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Chayei Sarah

“AND AVRAHAM CAME TO EULOGIZE SARAH...” (BEREISHIS 23:2)

Shouldn't the pasuk simply say that Avraham eulogized Sarah?

THE COMMENTARIES ASK: Why did the Torah say that Avraham “came” to eulogize Sarah? Shouldn't the *pasuk* simply say that Avraham eulogized Sarah? The Ramban (ibid., second answer) explains that “coming” to do a certain action refers to a preliminary step in the process. Before Avraham actually eulogized Sarah, he “awakened” or inspired himself and then started the *mitzvah*. The use of the active verb “came,” implies that Avraham consciously worked on his emotions and not that he was passively inspired by the events acting upon him.

Avraham was the greatest *kiruv* worker of his time, probably of all time, and was presumably a most eloquent orator, with the skill and experience to convey his thoughts and feelings effectively. As the paragon of *chesed*, he certainly possessed the ability to summon all of his formidable talents to perform the ultimate kindness – the *chesed shel emes* – of a fitting final tribute to his beloved wife Sarah. His marriage to Sarah, lasting more than 85 years (see Avoda Zara 9a) was the epitome of *shalom bayis*, of mutual love and respect. Avraham, with his greatness of spirit and intellect, combined with the love he had for Sarah, surely noticed and appreciated her exceptional qualities and, without any additional inspiration, would have delivered the most moving, tear-filled *hesped* we can imagine, with words surging straight from his heart. Why, then, should Avraham have to prepare himself emotionally to give this eulogy? What could this “awakening” of his feelings accomplish beyond all that he already felt for the irreplaceable loss of his wife?

Any mitzvah or positive action can be enhanced and improved

Apparently, any *mitzvah* or positive action can be enhanced and improved by taking time to prepare oneself beforehand. As the Mesilas Yesharim writes (Chap. 17) “...one should not begin a *mitzvah* suddenly, while his mind is not yet settled and able to contemplate what he is doing; rather he should ready himself and patiently prepare his heart until he enters a state of contemplation. Then he should reflect on what he is going to do and before Whom he is going to do it, because by entering into this thought process, it will become easy for him to throw off all ulterior motives and implant in his heart the true intention that Hashem desires.” This advice is for any Jew, about to perform any *mitzvah*. From Avraham's example we learn that even the greatest, most talented and supremely motivated giant of a person will fulfill a *mitzvah* on an even higher level if he takes the time to prepare and inspire himself beforehand. By telling us about this detail, the Torah is also teaching us that we are expected to apply this effort to upgrade our own performance of any *mitzvah*.

How much time do we invest in our mitzvos?

How much time do we invest in our *mitzvos*? While this concept is a universal one, *tefilah* is a good example of a *mitzvah* that needs preparation, both externally – as in how we dress – and internally – as in our motivations and thoughts. As the Ramchal (ibid.) goes on to quote from the *gemara* (Brachos 30b), “The pious ones of earlier generations ... would focus and prepare their hearts for the *tefilah* they were about to pray, eliminating distracting thoughts and filling their minds, through contemplation, with the requisite fear and love of Hashem.” May we appreciate the importance and privilege of serving Hashem, and prepare ourselves properly with *mussar* and inspiration that will polish all our *mitzvos* into shining jewels for Hashem's royal treasury.