



Following the death and burial of Sarah, Abraham is at critical moment in his life. We read:

ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם בכל. (בר' כד:א)  
*Now Abraham was old, advanced in days, and GOD had blessed Avraham in everything.* (Gen. 24:1)

**Everything** can mean a lot of things. Nevertheless, there is still one thing missing from his life: continuity. From the moment he heard the words **Lekh lekha**, the very beginning of his journey, God has promised him numerous offspring many times, including this final promise at the end of the Akedah: **I will make your seed many, yes, many, like the stars of the heavens and like the sand that is on the shore of the sea** (Gen. 22:17). But Abraham still has nothing to show for himself. Following the Akedah, the Torah tells us that Abraham's brother, Nachor, has an abundance of children back in Haran, including a granddaughter, **Rivka**.<sup>1</sup> Abraham is nearing 140 and his keenly aware of his own mortality. He is also keenly aware that in order to produce many offspring, Isaac would need, first and foremost, a wife, and he was pretty sure that she would not be coming down from heaven. Since the Akedah, God has not spoken to him. We sense his urgency. On the one hand, he knows that God makes things happen. On the other, **he knows that if they don't happen, he has to move things along himself.** Therefore, he turns to his servant:

ויאמר אברהם אל עבדו זקן ביתו המשל ככל אשר לו שים נא ידך תחת ירכי. ואשביעך בה' אלהי השמים ואלהי הארץ אשר לא תקח אשה לבני מבנות הכנעני אשר אנכי יושב בקרבם. (בר' כד:ב-ג)  
*Abraham said to his servant, the elder of his household, who ruled over all that was his: Pray put your hand under my thigh! I want you to swear by GOD, the God of Heaven and the God of Earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the women of the Canaanites, among whom I am settled.* (Gen. 24:3-4)

Notice that Abraham doesn't come right out and say to his servant, **Go get Rivka from my brother's family so that Isaac can marry her.** Why not? Because it's been a long time since he has communicated with his brother. And we

could speculate, having seen an example of his shrewdness in his burial-cave negotiations with Ephron the Hittite, that coming right out with her name would have put him in a weak bargaining position. **If he sent his servant with a specific "ask" for Rivka, it would have driven up his "cost".** He leaves his prospect unnamed, but at the very least, we know who Abraham wants. He has to act quickly, otherwise she could be betrothed to someone else.

**Why does Abraham make his servant swear an oath?**

He certainly trusts his servant, but he may not live to see this happen. The only way he can enforce a promise beyond his life is through an oath.

**Why does Abraham insist that Isaac not marry a Canaanite?** We know that the Canaanites are idolaters. But in a couple of generations, Jacob's sons will all marry Canaanites. The deeper reason here is that it is a **reset: it restarts the whole story.** If Abraham and Sarah would have had 12 sons, "the nation" that God had promised him, we would be well on into God's plan. But just as God insisted that the bearer of the covenant be the child of Abraham and **his** next-of-kin Sarah, Abraham here is insisting that his nation - assuming that Isaac goes on to sire 12 sons - be the offspring of Isaac and **his** next-of-kin. This is not a story opposing intermarriage. **It is a story about starting over.**

ויאמר אליו העבד אולי לא תאבה האשה ללכת אחרי אל הארץ הזאת והקשב אשיב את בנך אל הארץ אשר יצאת משם. (בר' כד:ה)

*The servant said to him: Perhaps the woman will not consent to go after me to this land; may I then bring your son back there, back to the land from which you once went out?* (Gen. 24:5)

**Why does the servant think she won't consent to go?** We could speculate on many reasons: distance from her family; fear of an unknown place and culture, fear of travel and, not the least, fear that she would spend her life imprisoned in a miserable marriage to a man that she hardly knew. So what? Women were commonly betrothed without their consent in antiquity! But by raising the possibility of consent in the prospective bride, **the servant demonstrates a moral concern for her agency**, as befits a servant who has been modeled by Abraham. He is also showing Abraham that he understands that just as Sarah must have had to consent in order to travel to Canaan with Abraham, the prospective wife of Isaac will also have to consent to come to Canaan. Moreover, this is also a foreshadowing of the penultimate moment in the story: **They called Rivka and said to her: Will you go with this man? She said: I will go.** (Gen 24:58) **Yes. I consent.**

<sup>1</sup> Now after these events it was, that it was told to Avraham, saying: Here, Milca too has borne, sons to Nachor your brother: Utz his firstborn and Buz his brother, Kemuel father of Aram, and Cesed, Hazo, Pildash, Yidlaf, and Betuel. **Now**

**Betuel begot Rivka.**— These eight Milca bore to Nahor, Avraham's brother. And his concubine—her name was Re'uma—bore too: Tevah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maakha. (Gen. 22:20-24).

**Why does the servant raise the possibility of bringing Isaac there?** By raising this possibility, the servant is cleverly trying to clarify what is at stake here. **If this is only about a marriage, and creating a family, then theoretically, it shouldn't matter where he lives. If she won't travel here, to Canaan, then let him go there, to Haran. Besides, the experience might do him good! As befits all leaders.**

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲבִרְהָם הַשְׁמֵר לְךָ כִּן תָּשִׁיב אֶת בְּנִי שָׁמָּה. (בר' כד:ו)

**Abraham said to him: Take you care that you do not ever bring my son back there!** (Gen. 24:6)

**Why does Abraham object to the prospect of sending Isaac to Haran?** Perhaps Abraham thinks that Isaac is not strong enough to resist being absorbed into a different family. After all, Isaac has no family structure of his own. A large family, like Nachor's, would have quickly taken him in. While Abraham had to constantly prove himself worthy of God's trust, Isaac merits the covenant simply on the basis of being Abraham's sole heir. **But why is Abraham so adamant?** The servant's question puts the two central driving forces of Abraham's life - a) inheriting the **land** and b) producing a future **people** - in conflict with one another. **When Abraham summons the servant to fetch a wife for his son, the servant is wondering whether producing a people now takes urgent priority for Abraham at over inheriting the land.** Which is more important? The **land** or the **people**? Abraham wants a wife for Isaac **and** adamantly prohibits Isaac from journeying outside the land, indicating that he is not going to compromise on either of them. Both are non-negotiable because God has sworn to both of them.

ה' אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמֵאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי וַאֲשֶׁר דָּבַר לִי וַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לִי לֵאמֹר לְנָרְעָדָה אֶתְּךָ הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת הוּא יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ לִפְנֵיךָ וּלְקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבְנִי מִשָּׁם. (בר' כד:ז)

**GOD, the God of Heaven, who took me from my father's house and from my kindred, who spoke to me, who swore to me, saying: I give this land to your seed—he himself will send his angel on before you, so that you take a wife for my son from there.** (Gen. 24:7)

**What is the meaning of God will send his angel before you?** We could attribute this to Abraham's total faith, or to Abraham's total sense of entitlement. Nahum Sarna points out that these are Abraham's last words on record, and they are in marked contrast to his first words. Sarna: **Expressing his absolute faith in the workings of a benign Providence, they are in striking contrast to the first words that the text ascribes to him, an expression of doubt (15:2f, 8).** Indeed,



when God promises the elderly, childless Abraham that **your reward will be very great** (Gen. 15:1) Abraham responds with doubt and chutzpah! **What are you going to give me? The only person I have in my household is Dammesek Eliezer!** (Gen. 15:2) Then when God promises him the land, Abraham doubles down: **How will I know that I will possess it?** (15:8). But here, Abraham is resolute that God will provide all the guidance that is necessary, from no less than angel. We might also suggest that Abraham's insistence that **God will provide an angel** comes out of a sense of entitlement and deservedness. **God took me out of my father's household and my birthplace - I have left everything I have known for you; God who spoke to me - he asked me to enter a covenant with him, which I did willingly And God who swore to me - God made an oath with me. The land and the progeny are his promise, his oath! It's his word! His guaranty! And after all that I have done for him, circumcise myself and not withhold trauma from my son in nearly sacrificing him, he is not going to let me down. He is not going to violate his oath!**

וְאִם לֹא תֵאָדָה הָאִשָּׁה לָלֶכֶת אַחֲרַי וְנִקִּיתָ מִשְׁבַּעְתִּי זֹאת רַק אֶת בְּנִי לֹא תָשִׁב שָׁמָּה. וַיִּשָּׁם הָעֶבֶד אֶת יָדוֹ תַּחַת יָרֵךְ אֲבִרְהָם אֲדֹנָיו וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ עַל הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה. (בר' כד:ח-ט)

**Now if the woman is not willing to go after you, you will be clear from this sworn-oath of mine; only: You are not to bring my son back there! The servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his lord, and swore to him [an oath] about this matter.** (Gen. 24:8-9)

**Finally, why does Abraham say to his servant, you will be clean from my oath?** This is an interesting provision in the contract that insures the servant against any penalty if he fails on the grounds that the woman refuses to travel to Canaan. But it has greater force than that. It is Abraham's way of indirectly issuing an ultimatum to God. **God, I'm telling you: This better happen! Or else, not only is my oath with the servant null and void, but your oath with me is null and void, because there is no way you can fulfill your part of the oath unless you make this happen! And because I have fulfilled everything you have asked of me, I expect this to come from You!** The servant makes the oath with Abraham and sets off for Haran. In the end, Rivka marries Isaac, and we come to the end of Abraham's life. Despite the challenges, despite the 65 years between **Lekh Lekha** and now, Abraham has remained steadfast in his faith. **Abraham's oath with his servant is his attempt to move history forward. In this extraordinary moment we observe that he relies tremendously on God but also on himself.** Shabbat Shalom!

**Today is day 414 of the war and the captivity of the hostages. We long for the return of the hostages. We pray that they are still alive. May God shield Israel and protect the IDF from all harm in Gaza and Lebanon.**

**This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Linda Tondow and family in memory of Al Tondow, z'l, on the anniversary of his Bar Mitzvah Shabbat.**