

# תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

RELIGIOUS ZIONIST KOLLELS כוללים ציוניים בתפוצות

## Shabbat Shalom from Torah MiTzion

### Issue 116: Parshat Chayei Sarah

25-26 November 2005, 24 Cheshvan 5766

#### In this week's issue:

- 1) Parshat Chayei Sarah: God in Heaven, and On Earth, Rav Weitzman
- 2) Injurious Employment in Israel - Ideals and Reality Compared, Simon Jackson
- 3) Family Learning, Parshat Cheyi Sarah, Bluma Zalzman
- 4) Love of the Land: Tzfat (Safed)

## God in Heaven, and On Earth

Rav Gideon Weitzman, former Rosh Kollel, Greater Washington

In this week's parshah Avraham sends his trusted servant on a mission to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. Before sending the servant off, he makes him swear that not only will he find Yitzchak a wife but he will bring the wife back to the land of Canaan and not send Yitzchak to her, outside of the Promised Land.

The servant is somewhat worried to promise such a thing, "Maybe the woman will not want to follow me back to this land." What will happen if she refuses to leave her land to come to Canaan.

Avraham is adamant that in all circumstances Yitzchak will not leave Israel and he promises the servant, "God, the God of the heavens who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth and who spoke to me and swore to me saying, 'I will give this land to your seed', He will send His angel before you and you will take a wife from there for my son." (BeReishit 24:7)

This verse appears straightforward except for one thing, Avraham describes God as the God of heavens. Yet just a few verses previously, while making the servant swear he referred to God as "the God of the heaven and the God of the land." Why does Avraham appear to limit God's influence only to the heaven and not to the land?

Rashi supplies an answer "he said that now He is the God of the heavens and the God of the earth as I made Him known to the people, but when He took me out from my father's house He was the God of the heavens but not the God of the earth as the inhabitants of the world did not know Him and His Name was not common in the world."

Until Avraham started publicizing God's Name to the people of the world, God Himself was in some way confined to the heavens but He was not really the God of the earth. If Rashi had not said this we would never say such a thing, as it appears that God was limited until Avraham came along to the world.

However, Rashi is making a very deep statement about Avraham's task in the world. Since Adam's sin there was a split in the world between heaven and earth. Man existed and acted in the physical tangible world, and God resided in heavens, and the two met very rarely. Even at times when man looked for God he would look to the heavens, remember the Tower of Babel, but could not conceive of finding God residing in the physical world.

All this was true until Avraham came along and taught the entire world an important lesson about the relationship between man and God. God, he said, is not relegated to the heavens, God and Godliness exist in this world and it is our task as humans to seek out God within the confines of the physical world wherever we can find Him.

We are to take the elements of the physical world; food, physical pleasures, the land itself, and elevate it to the level that we can utilize it to serve God. In this way God is not only God of the heavens, but He is also God of the earth.

This was the essence of the novelty of Avraham's approach and this is the essence of being a Jew, we need to recognize and publicize God not only in the spiritual plane but in our everyday physical lives as well.

Shabbat Shalom

### **Injurious Employment in Israel - Ideals and Reality Compared** **Simon M. Jackson, Legal Advisor to Torah MiTzion**

*In the news.* Cashiers forced to stand on their feet all day long without resting even for a short period of time. Only in the third-world you're thinking.

The year 2004: Long-time Israeli social activist was standing in line at the branch of the SuperPharm drugstore chain in Jerusalem's Talpiot commercial area, when he noticed the woman behind the cash register seemed tired. "I asked her why, and she said she'd been standing all day," says Adv. Yuval Elbasha. "You should sit down," I said. "And she told me she couldn't, that it was against company policy," that she had to be at eye-level with the customers.

Elbasha, a secular Israeli attorney, who is also founder and director of the Hebrew University's Legal Education Center for Human Rights, stopped shopping at the store: "I didn't want to give my business to a chain that treated its employees that way," says Elbasha.

"SuperPharm, with its leading market position and its huge profits, is an especially gratifying example of an employer that scorns the dignity of its workers. The management claims it wants to serve customers at eye-level. It apparently is not bothered that at foot-level the cashiers are suffering pain" (Haaretz article 11.11.04, "The Right to Sit Down"). Ironically, the chain's policy on standing is taken from the American market. The policy on not sitting for eight hours is not a form of employment prohibited by Israeli law, but even so not everything that is wrong is necessarily illegal. We will return in our next column to the outcome of this case.

One of the clearest illustrations of the phenomenon of "injurious employment" at work in modern-day society is the practice of locking workers into their jobs for a period of 12-14 months at banks or the cellular phone companies. Workers are forced to sign contracts according to which if they leave before the end of this period or cause their dismissal they will be charged a fine of between NIS 1,500 - NIS 3,500. Arguably this is illegal, restricting as it does the employees' freedom of occupation. Similar complaints from gas station employees made to Israel's "Kav LaOved" are that their employers deduct money from their already low salaries if they fail to discover that money received from customers is forged.

### ***Avodat Parech***

The Torah cautions us on many occasions to be attentive to the plight of others in the society in which we live. We are commanded "not to rule him [the slave] ruthlessly [*befarech*]" (Vayikra 25:43). The Torah does not explain the definition of *avodat parech*. Onkelus translates it simply as "difficult work." However, some of the commentaries noted the uniqueness of this phrase. Rav Saadia Gaon saw in it "affliction and degradation," while the Rashbam linked it to the root *p"r"ch* which implies "breaking something down into tiny pieces" and the Ramban pointed out its relentlessness and accompanying slight to the person's dignity. In other words, *avodat parech* is backbreaking work which crushes a person's body - and spirit.

The term *befarech* occurs on only two other occasions in the Torah: "The Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel *ruthlessly*. in every kind of work with which they worked them *ruthlessly*" (Shemot 1:13-14). Because we too were the victims of Egyptian bondage, we have first-hand experience of slavery and humiliation - and are therefore enjoined to treat our fellow human beings with kindness, compassion and care: "You shall remember that you [too] were a slave in the land of Egypt" (Devarim 15:15).

### **The Biblical law surrendered them to slavery - but not to disgrace**

As with many other areas of Halacha, here too the guiding principle for employees - all employee: whether old or young, man or woman, permanent or temporary worker, citizen of the State or foreign citizen - is derived from the fact that every human being is created in the image of God, Whom everyone is obligated to honor. Similarly, as with many other areas, the employer is commanded to fulfill his ethical obligations, to act towards others beyond the letter of the law and not to make do with simply protecting the formal legal rights to which his workers are entitled.

The words of the Rambam are truly illuminating in this regard. While technically speaking, a Canaanite slave is the property of his master, the Rambam chose to close his *Laws of Slavery* as well as his entire "Sefer Kinyan" - Laws of Acquisitions (which deals with all the Halachot of sale, gifts, neighbors, partners and agents, and slaves) with a totally different approach:

"It is permissible to work a heathen slave relentlessly. However, even though it is lawful, the quality of benevolence and the paths of wisdom demand that a human being be merciful and striving for justice. One should not press his heavy yoke on his slave and torment him, but he should give him food to eat and drink of everything.

The sages of old were in the habit of sharing with their slaves every dish they ate, and they fed the cattle as well as the slaves before they fed themselves."

However, the Rambam was not satisfied with such a general statement, but insists on giving his words practical expression:

"Nor should a master disgrace his slave by hand nor should he verbally abuse him, for **the Biblical law surrendered them to slavery but not to disgrace** [Niddah 47a]. He should not scream at them angrily, but should listen to his complaints. Iyov expressly relates this point: *If I ever spurned justice for my servants and maidservants when they contended with me. Did not He who made in the belly make him too? And did not One [God/Creator] fashion us in the womb?* [31:13-15].

Cruelty, is frequently found among the heathens who worship idols, but for the progeny of Abraham, the people upon whom God bestowed the goodness of the Torah, commanding them to observe laws of virtue, we are enjoined to be merciful towards all creatures. So too, when speaking about Divine attributes, He commanded us to imitate [God] through the mitzvot. As the Psalmist said, *His mercy is upon all His works* [Psalms 145:9] *Whoever is merciful will receive mercy, for it is written He will be merciful and compassionate to you and multiply you* [Devarim 13:18]" [Hilchot Avadim 9:8]

"The Torah gave them over to slavery, but not to shame." Although slaves must do their master's bidding, the master has no right to humiliate them by treating them disrespectfully. This is a great and fundamental principle that the Torah brought to the world: both master and slave derive from one common Source - "a most remarkable advance on the ethics of antiquity" (A.S. Peake, Christian Hebraist, *Commentary on Job*). Indeed, Rav Yosef Karo in his Kesef Mishnah commentary on these words of the Rambam goes far as to actually state (uncharacteristically for the great Halachist) how "the words of our teacher (Rabbeinu) are so fitting for him," in light of the Rambam's ethical approach to life. *And if this was true in ancient Israel when slavery was the prevalent norm, how much the more should it apply to employees in our own times, who live in a Jewish and democratic State, founded as it is on the value of human dignity and freedom.*

### **Next Column: Injurious Employment in the Fifteenth Century - and Today**

#### **Family Learning: Parshat Chayei Sarah Bluma Zalcman**

- 1) How much money did Ephron charge Avraham for Ma'arat HaMachpeila at the beginning and how much did he charge for it in the end?
- 2) What were the signs that Eliezer looked for in a girl, in order for her to be able to marry Yitzchak?
- 3) What was Rivka's father's name and how was he related to Avraham?
- 4) Who was Ketura and why was she called that?
- 5) Where did Yitzchak settle after Avraham passed away?

*Answers follow below*

## Love of the Land: Tzfat (Safed)

Tzfat is a city located in Northern Israel. To the west it faces the Kinneret and to the right it faces Har Meron. It is one of the four holy cities in Israel along with Jerusalem, Chevron, and Tiveria.

The earliest known existence of the city was during the era of the second Bait Hamikdash. However, it is believed that Tzfat is the city where Shem and Ever (the son and grandson of Noach) established their Yeshivah. It was one of the cities that Yoseph ben Matityahu fortified against the invading Romans. During the Crusades, Tzfat was an important strategic point.

When Israel was captured by the Turks in 1517, Tzfat was inhabited by Sephardic Jews. The city was made into an important spiritual center, and was a place where the Kabbalah flourished. Many of the well known Kabbalists lived and studied in Tzfat such as, Yitzchak Luria (The Ar"l), Chayyim Wittel, Moshe Kardibero along with the author of the Shulchan Aruch Rabbi Yoseph Caro and the songwriters Shlomo Alkabetz and Yisrael Nagera. Tzfat was also the city where the first printing shop was set up in the Middle East in 1578.

Tzfat went through several periods of growth and destruction, due to plagues, earthquakes and Arab riots, until the War of Independence in 1948. Tzfat had only about 2,000 Jews in a population of twelve thousand. These Jews were under siege until the city was liberated by the Palmach in an operation called "Yiftach". It was a difficult battle and there were many casualties.

After the War of Independence, most of the Arabs fled the city. The city absorbed many new immigrants (olim) from Ethiopia and Russia and started to flourish outside the old city. The city became a major tourist attraction in the fifties and the sixties. In the seventies the city started becoming a spiritual center once again causing a major flow of Charedim to the city, which in turn caused a decline in the tourism.

Many of the old Shuls and buildings are still in use. The Jewish quarter in Tzfat is still a vibrant Jewish community.

**Torah MiTzion** establishes Religious Zionist Kollels (centers of Jewish learning and outreach) in Diaspora Jewish communities to strengthen the study of Torah, Jewish identity, the unity of the Jewish people, and the connection between Torah study and Israel.

The Kollels, led by a Rosh Kollel, are comprised of Israeli shlichim (emissaries) - married men and their wives, and single young men, graduates of Yeshivot Hesder in Israel - who serve in the communities for a period of one-three years.

Torah MiTzion is also proud to be a partner of the "**Jewish Learning Initiative**" program on college campuses.

[www.jli.co.il](http://www.jli.co.il)

### **The Head Office in Jerusalem:**

**Beit Meir**, 54 King George Street

PO Box 71109

Jerusalem, 91710

Israel

**Tel: +972-2-620-9020**

**Email:** [office@torahmitzion.org](mailto:office@torahmitzion.org)

**Look for us on the web:** [www.TorahMiTzion.org](http://www.TorahMiTzion.org)

**For support and sponsoring options, please visit our website.**

### **Answers: Family Learning**

- 1) At first he told him it would be for free, then he charged him 400 silver shekels.
- 2) That she would offer him a drink, and also his camels
- 3) Betuel, he was Avraham's first cousin (their fathers were brothers).
- 4) Hagar, she was called Ketura because she changed her ways and now they were sweet like ketoret.
- 5) Be'er Lechai Ro'i.