

Dvar Torah - Chayei Sarah

What was Yitzchak doing?

In parashat Chayei Sarah we read how Avraham had sent his servant to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Yitzchak. Throughout the long absence of Eliezer, Yitzchak was keenly anticipating the result of the mission – what was he doing?

The Torah informs us 'V'Yitzchak Ba Mi'bo b'er L'Chai Ro'i V'hu Yosheiv B'erezt Hanegev' – Yitzchak had been living in the Negev which is the southern part of Israel and he travelled north to a place called B'er L'chai Ro'i.

'Vayeizei Yitzchak Lasuach Ba'sadeh lifnot arev' - from there he went to a field, and in that field he meditated (which means he davened) late in the afternoon. Sforno reminds us that B'er L'chai Ro'i was the same place to which Hagar took Yishmael after the two of them were banished from Avram and Sari's home. It was at B'er L'chai Ro'i that Hagar poured her heart out to Hashem, praying for him to save her child's life. It was there that her prayers were answered. Her eyes were opened and she saw a well of water in front of them.

So Yitzchak specifically wanted to daven to Hashem in a place where he knew He had previously answered prayers. From there he moved to 'Hasadeh' – 'the field' and we know from earlier on in the sedra that Avraham had purchased the cave of Machpela and the field that it was in. So therefore when the Torah says Hasadeh - the field, it must mean Chevron which indicates that Yitzchak went to visit the grave of his mother. And at that grave he poured out his heart - davening to Hashem. Not praying to his mother but through her so that Hashem should help Eliezer in his mission.

Now, the Torah tells us that he davened there 'lifnot arev' – towards the evening/late afternoon. And it's from here we learn that Yitzchak initiated the practice of davening in the afternoons - our Mincha prayer which we say every single afternoon was started then, by Yitzchak.

So therefore we are given a daily opportunity to learn some very important lessons from our patriarch Yitzchak. First of all, at critically important moments of our lives we need to turn heavenwards to Hashem. Secondly, where possible, it is appropriate that we choose to pray in a place which is known for prayers which have been successfully answered. And thirdly, to recognise the privilege that we have to be able to visit the graves of outstanding people of the past so that whilst davening to Hashem in those places, through the merit of those souls we should be blessed.

Shabbat Shalom