

The way we walk before God, an analysis from the Torah, the Rabbis, and the Apostolic Writings

This week's reading from **Parashat Chayei Sarah** (*Shemot / Genesis 23:1-25:18*) speaks about Abraham's wife Sarah dying (*23:1-3*) and opens with Abraham bargaining for a piece of land from the sons of Heth to bury his wife (*23:4-20*). Following the purchase of the land, Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac (*24:1-4*). We are not told who Abraham's servant (Eleazar) is until next week's Parashah. We are shown the kind of faith the servant of Abraham has in the Lord God to lead him to the woman God has chosen for Isaac (*24:11-21*). We are also told that Abraham marries Keturah (*25:1-6*), and he gives all that he has to Isaac, but only gives gifts to this other children and sends them away. Then we are told that Abraham dies (*25:7-8*). Eleazar had great faith in the God of Abraham to help him in his task to find a wife for Isaac. Eleazar believed in the Lord God of Abraham to help him according to his prayers.

Based upon the narrative in the Scriptures, the Lord prepared the minds and lives of Rebecca and her family so that Eleazar would know that he had found the woman the Lord has prepared for Isaac. Eleazar remembered God's promises, to fear Him, and to be willing to walk in the path that He has set before him. In a similar manner, we too are to be willing to walk in the path the Lord has set before us.

ספר בראשית פרק כד Bereshit / Genesis 24:40

מ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי
לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ אִתָּךְ וְהִצְלִיחַ
דַּרְכְּךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחַתִּי
וּמִבֵּית אָבִי:

24:40 'He said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father's house; (NASB)

In this week's reading, Eleazar describes to Rebecca's family how the Lord has helped him to determine she was the one God had prepared for Isaac. He quotes Abraham saying, *Bereshit / Genesis 24:40 'He said to me, 'The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send His angel with*

you to make your journey successful, and you will take a wife for my son from my relatives and from my father's house; (NASB, מ ויאמר אלי יהוה; אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מִלְּאָכֹוֹ אֶתְךָ וְהִצְלִיחַ דְּרָכְךָ וְלָקַחְתָּ אִשָּׁה לְבָנִי מִמִּשְׁפַּחְתִּי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו) Notice how Abraham's servant states, "the Lord before whom I have walked sent His angel..." The importance of the words used here is with regard to הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי from the word הִתְהַלַּךְ meaning *"I have walked."* Abraham's servant uses this word to describe the relationship between Abraham and God. This term is very significant and it has been used in the Torah to describe the manner in which others have walked with God, specifically, the kind of relationship a person has with the Lord God in heaven. For example, this word is also used in Parashat Noach to describe Noach. The Jewish commentary *Shelah Torah Ohr 35* draws out the significance of this word having the following to say concerning this word.

Shelah, Noach, Torah Ohr 35

Having explained all this, we can now understand the difference between Bereshit / Genesis 6:9 - אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים הִתְהַלַּךְ-נֹחַ, "Noach walked with the Lord," and Bereshit / Genesis 24:40 when Abraham describes himself in these words: יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו, "G'd before Whom I walked" Noach needed G'd to "hold his hand," so to speak, whereas Abraham was self-propelled, took the initiative. Noach was afraid to mix with the corrupt society he lived in and isolated himself with only G'd as his companion because he was afraid of the possible influence on him of contemporary society. Abraham was not only confident that he would not succumb to the corrupt society around him, but he tried to lead his fellow-men back to the path of monotheism and a life of good deeds. I have elaborated on this elsewhere. This is the plain meaning of those verses.

Notice how *Shelah Torah Ohr 35* writes that the differences in the use of this word is to describe the manner in which one walked, Noach walked *"with"* God, whereas Abraham walked *"before"* God.

It is important to look at the rabbinic commentary because at times the

rabbis draw out a particular context or point that emphasizes what is going on in the Torah Portion. In some editions of the Talmud Bavli, we read the words Mosef Rashi. Mosef Rashi is a modern invention from printers who collect Rashi's writing from other Masechtos (tractates, singular masechet מסכת) which add insight to the sugya (passage from the Talmud) at hand. The Mosef Rashi is simply a reference to Rashi's own words. Rashi's commentary on Parshat Noah discusses the difference between Abraham and Noah. Noah's relationship is described as the following:

“Noah walked with God...” - And with Abraham it says (Genesis 24): “Walk before Me!” Noah needed support to keep him up, but Abraham would strengthen himself and walk righteously on his own. את האלהים התהלך נח. ובאב־רהם הוא אומר (יז א) התהלך לפני, (כד מ) אשר התהלכתי לפניו, נח היה צריך סעד לתמכו, אבל אברהם היה מתחזק ומהלך בצדקו מאליו:

Here Rashi comments that *“Noah needed God's help to support him in his righteousness but Abraham strengthened himself and walked in his righteousness by himself.”* The idea here is that *“walking with”* or *“beside, next to”* someone is a description of receiving help or support to continue onward. The wording in Parashat Noach suggests that Noach needed help from the Lord. The description of Abraham, to walk *“before”* the Lord, is to say that Abraham did not need support, he was able to walk on his own.

Midrash Rabbah Bereishit Parashah 30, Part 10 explains the difference between Abraham and Noah through the analogy of a young child and an older child. Similar to a father who tells his son to walk with him, so too Noah walked alongside God as he needed His support. In contrast to this, Abraham as the older child can be more independent and can follow his Father's instructions without having to walk next to him (*he walked before the Lord*).

Based upon the Torah, we have more information regarding Abraham as opposed to Noach. The Torah descriptions of these two men suggest that Abraham was stronger in his religious convictions than Noah. The question is though, what does *לְפָנַי* really mean? In Parashat Lech Lecha, the same word is used, however in this case we have the Lord God

speaking to Abraham as a command, to get up and go. (א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה) (אֶל-אַבְרָם לֵךְ-לְךָ מֵאֲרָצְךָ וּמְנוּלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ: The Torah states that Abram was 90 years old when the Lord appeared to him, and we read in *Bereshit / Genesis 17:1*, א וַיְהִי אַבְרָם בֶּן-תְּשָׁעִים שָׁנָה וַתֵּשֶׁע, *17:1 Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. (NASB)* Rashi explains the word הִתְהַלֵּךְ means to cling to the service of God. So the interpretation may be, regarding what Eleazar said to Rebecca’s family, יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָכּוֹ “*the Lord before whom I have walked sent His angel...*” is to say that Abraham clung to the service of God, to speak of His promises, and to add to the number of people who believed in the One True God. Do you live your life like Abraham lived his?

In the Torah, the word הִתְהַלֵּךְ is used in reference to two more people, Enoch and Joseph. Enoch is described as וַיְהִי הִלְכֵךְ הַנּוֹדֵךְ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים “*And Enoch walked with God*” (*Bereshit / Genesis 5:22-24*) Rashi explains that Enoch was a righteous man but had a weak mind and could have easily been persuaded to return to evil. In order to prevent this from happening, the Lord God shortened his days so that he would remain and be known as a righteous person. Midrash Rabbah Bereshit speaks of Enoch and describes Enoch as פְּעָמִים צָדִיק פְּעָמִים רָשָׁע meaning that he was a man who was “*sometimes righteous, sometimes evil.*” (*Midrash Rabbah Bereshit Parashat 25, Part 1*).

Jacob on the other hand, we read in his blessing to his sons, he said to Joseph, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתָּ אִתִּי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם, טו וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתָּ אִתִּי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים הִרְעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: “*God, before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, God Who sustained me as long as I am alive, until this day*” (*Bereshit / Genesis 48:15*) Sforno explains these words הִתְהַלַּכְתָּ אִתִּי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים saying God should do good for Joseph and fulfil his blessing in the merit of Abraham and Isaac, who walked before God.

The significance on the use of this word in this week’s Torah portion, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת-יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְתָּ אִתִּי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים הִרְעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד-הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה: “*the Lord before whom I have walked sent His angel,*” the Torah uses the word הִתְהַלֵּךְ to describe different men and their differing levels of commitment to God. Based upon the rabbinic commentaries, Enoch is at the lowest point as he sometimes does evil and

would very easily have been persuaded to return to his former ways. The Lord God needed to take him out of this world in order to preserve his righteousness. Noah was a little higher but needed God's direct support to ensure that he remained on the correct path, the path of righteousness and justice. Abraham was at the top because he fulfilled God's commands, cleaved to the service of the Lord, he taught his children and others about the Lord, and lived life according to his faith. Abraham had strong convictions and was not influenced by the pagan forces that surrounded him. Note the land of Ur as his origin.

What is significant about the word **יְהִי לְךָ**, the rabbis comments, and this study is from time to time, we all see areas in our lives that we struggle with. Abraham struggled with his faith, though it does not appear so on the surface, we understand his based on his relationship with Hagar to help the Lord along in the promised seed. There are always areas in our lives that we wish could be different. It might be moral failures or habits that have us discouraged in repetitive actions. How does the Lord God want us to approach these areas in our lives that we struggle with? Is there a way to find freedom and real change? Yes, there is a way! What we can come to understand concerning these things is the manner in which the Lord is working in our lives. In many ways we are like Enoch and Noah. As Enoch, we have the tendency to turn to do unrighteous things, and yet while trying to cling to the righteousness of God. In this instance, the Lord works in our lives to draw us out of situations that would cause us to increase our unrighteous deeds. As Noah, the Lord needs to walk along side of us to help us, to sustain us every step of the way. For example, He is drawing us to Himself, calling us out of the old ways and into the new way of living according to His Word. This is the struggle that we have deep within, regarding the aspects in our lives we know are wrong, things like, poor decisions, habits, and behaviors that we are ashamed of. The Lord sends His Holy Spirit in Yeshua the Messiah for the purpose of helping us overcome these shameful ways. As Abraham, in the Messiah Yeshua, we have been given the power (ability) to fulfill God's commands, cleave to the service of the Lord, to have a desire to teach our children and others about the Lord, and to live life according to our faith. With the indwelling of God's Spirit, we see many areas that need changing and the Lord God is here to help us **יְהִי לְךָ** before Him!

The Torah, God's commands, were given for the purpose of teach-

ing us how we are to live, and there are any areas and many times we do not measure up. God's Law reveals our shortcomings, our sins, and we should be thankful to see them, because in doing so (in the realization of our sins) we are able to bring them to the Lord, to seek forgiveness, to repent, and seek the Lord's help to overcome the sin in our lives. Remember that *Galatians 3:24* states, "*The law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ that we may be justified by faith.*"

The Torah also speaks of the need for redemption. When we come to the Lord, we know, based upon His Word, that we need redemption. Midrash Tehillim 79, Part 5 speaks of this need for redemption before God.

Midrash Tehillim 79, Part 5

When a mortal owes one hundred minas to his friend, and his friend says, Give me my money, and he answers, I have no money, what is there for his friend to do? He must go along. Not so the Holy One blessed be He. He makes the soul pay. When the soul goes forth, He makes the body pay, as is said, He will consume both soul and body (Isaiah 10:18). When there is neither soul nor body, He makes the bones pay, as is said, At that time, says the Lord, they will bring out the bones of the kings of Judah and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves (Jeremiah 8:1)

לחבירו מאה מנה, אמר לו תן לי מעותי, אמר לו אין לי, מה יש לעשות הולך לו, אבל הקב"ה אינו כן, אלא גובה מן הנפש, יצאה הנפש גובה מן הבשר, וכה"א מנפש ועד בשר יכלה (ישעיה י יח), אין לו נפש ולא בשר גובה מן העצמות

In the midrash on *Tehillim / Psalms 78*, the rabbis comment on the war and blood of the people being poured out in the Land of Israel. The blood being poured out is placed in contrast to a man owing money to his brother. When his friend asks to be paid, and the man is unable to pay, his friend can only go along and wait for his friend to pay. The Lord God in heaven however has no such restriction, the Lord is able to make both the body and the soul pay. When the soul leaves the body, the Lord

makes both pay for sins. This is why the Scriptures state in *1 Corinthians 6:20* *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.* (NASB, ἡγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς: δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν.) Here we are told “*egorasthete*” ἡγοράσθητε, “*that you are bought,*” and “*times*” τιμῆς, “*at a price,*” and this price was to pay for the alienation that occurs between man and God because of sin. According to the Apostolic Writings, Yeshua paid the price for us to redeem us from our sins and restore the relationship with our Father in heaven that we once had lost. The Midrash says that when there is neither soul or body to make payment, the Lord makes the bones pay (אין לו נפש ולא בשר) (גובה מן העצמות). It appears as if the bones are brought out and mocked. What is interesting is the use of the word העצמות and the root word עצם can have the meaning “*bone, a thing or object, or the essence of something.*” The idea here is that when the living have nothing more to pay, the very essence of who they are (all that is left) is brought out to make payment. It is in this way in which God’s grace makes a powerful difference in our lives. When we come to the Messiah, we know that we are in need of a Savior. We need the Lord just as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham did, for the purpose of our being aware of who we are in the Messiah, a redeemed and forgiven people. Notice something the author of the book of Hebrews states in *Hebrews 4:13-16*.

Hebrews 4:13-16

4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 4:14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 4:16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NASB, ¹³καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κτίσις ἀφανῆς ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, πάντα δὲ γυμνὰ καὶ τετραχλισμένα τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς ὃν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος. ¹⁴Ἐχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν διεληλυθότα τοὺς οὐρανούς, Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, κρατῶμεν

τῆς ὁμολογίας: ¹⁵οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον
συπαθῆσαι ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ
πάντα καθ’ ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας. ¹⁶προσερχώμεθα
οὖν μετὰ παρρησίας τῷ θρόνῳ τῆς χάριτος, ἵνα λάβωμεν
ἔλεος καὶ χάριν εὕρωμεν εἰς εὐκαιρον βοήθειαν.)

The book of Hebrews states that nothing is hidden from the Lord God in heaven and that we have a great high priest who ascended into heaven (passed through the heavens), and therefore we are to hold fast to our confession. The holding fast is exactly how Rashi explains the word **הִתְהַלַּךְ** to mean that Abraham clung to the service of God. The holding fast to the confession is also synonymous to living what we say we believe, just like Eleazar described to Rebecca’s family, **הַיְהוָה אֲשֶׁר-הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנָיו יִשְׁלַח מַלְאָךְ** כּוֹ *“the Lord before whom I have walked sent His angel...”* is to say that we too are to cling to the service of God, to speak of His promises, and to add to the number of people who believed in the One True God. Based upon the description of Enoch, Noach, and Abraham, they struggled with life. We are told in the book of Hebrews that Yeshua overcome the struggles of life, that he was tempted in all things, and understands our needs, our hurts and our pains. Because of these things, we are able to draw near to the throne of God with confidence in the Messiah, that we may receive mercy and find the grace of God! This is how the Torah leads us to the Messiah, and this is what Paul meant in Romans 1 that all of Scripture speaks of the gospel message, Yeshua the Messiah (**יֵשׁוּעַ הוּא הַמְּשִׁיחַ**)!

