

---

## פרשת חיי שרה

---

פרק כז פסוק א

ואברהם זקן בא בימים וי-הנה ברוך את-אברהם בכל:

רש"י

רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה, שנאמר (משלי ה) ה' קנני ראשית דרכו (קידושין לב:)

מושג

אין זקן אלא מי שקנה חכמה

### Translation:

There is no 'Zakein' other than he who has acquired wisdom<sup>1</sup>.

### Explanation:

The word זקן is a contraction of the words זזה קנה, *this he has acquired*. It refers to the wisdom of Torah, which was Hashem's first acquisition. It can be referring to an elder who has acquired wisdom over the years, or even a younger תלמיד חכם who has acquired wisdom through the study of Torah. The והדרת פני זקן מצוה of זקן, to honor a זקן, thus applies to both.

Avrohom's greatest blessing was his זקנה, the wisdom which he had gained through his understanding of Torah. Of all the things we acquire throughout life only our wisdom will last and develop even as we grow old.

### Looking in the Pasuk:

The lesson of the Gemoroh helps us understand why Avrohom's command to Eliezer is introduced with the fact that Avrohom was growing old and had been blessed<sup>2</sup>. Avrohom's warns Eliezer not to search for a wife among the materialistic Cananim but rather to go to the home of the spiritual Besuel and Lavan even though they were idol worshipers. Also understood is the term בא בימים. Since Avrohom was blessed with wisdom he looked forward to his old age as his wisdom would grow and deepen.

### Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: The word זקן refers to a wise person, and is a contraction of the word זזה קנה, this he has acquired. The Mitzvah of והדרת פני זקן thus commands us to respect the wise.

Understand: All material things wear down as they age and do not last forever. However, the wisdom we acquire through the learning of Torah remains intact in our old age and in the world to come. Avrohom realized that wisdom was the blessing of his old age and commanded Eliezer to seek a wife for Yitzchok who would appreciate this as well.

Think: The descriptive nature of Tanach words provides insight and meaning. In addition, close inspection of introductory phrases yields deeper understanding.

---

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

---

## NOTES

---

1. This Musag is taken from the Gemoroh in Kedushin which is discussing the Pasuk (ויקרא יט:לב) of זקן. One opinion is that it refers to an elder, while ר' יוסי הגלילי believes it refers to any תלמיד חכם even if he is young. The Halacha goes according to his opinion and thus we learn the obligation to stand for a תלמיד חכם.

The question to be answered is, how does ר' יוסי הגלילי know that it refers to a תלמיד חכם? After all the Pasuk did not seem to refer to wisdom at all! Also interesting is his words מי שקנה חכמה; why does he use this terminology? Would it not be more accurate to simply say אלא תלמיד חכם?

The answer is found in the Pasuk that ר' יוסי הגלילי brings to prove his point. He quotes a Pasuk in Mishlei which is talking about the חכמה of תורה<sup>3</sup>. The Pasuk tells us ה' קנני ראשית דרכו Hashem acquired me at the beginning of His path. The Mishna in Avos<sup>4</sup> understands this to be teaching that Torah is one of Hashem's acquisitions:

חמשה קנינים קנה הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו ואלו הן תורה קנין אחד שמים וארץ קנין אחד אברהם קנין אחד ישראל קנין אחד בית המקדש קנין אחד. תורה קנין אחד מגין דכתיב ה' קנני ראשית דרכו.

In addition, Chazal<sup>5</sup> learn from this Pasuk that Torah was the very first acquisition:

שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם, ואלו הן: תורה, ותשובה, וגן עדן, וגיהנם, וכסא הכבוד, ובית המקדש, ושמו של משיח. תורה דכתיב ה' קנני ראשית דרכו.

And, finally, this Pasuk teaches us<sup>6</sup> that Hashem used this קנין, the חכמת התורה, to actually create the world:

חביבין ישראל שניתן להם כלי שבו נברא העולם. ומה הוא כלי זה? זו תורה שבה נברא העולם. מגין? שכך אמרה תורה ה' קנני ראשית דרכו.<sup>7</sup>

But, what does this have to do with the word זקן?

ר' יוסי הגלילי is of the opinion that the word זקן is a contraction of זה קנה, *this he has acquired*. Since we are not sure which acquisition we are talking about we assume it to be referring to the very first acquisition, the Torah. Thus, זקן, explains ר' יוסי הגלילי, is referring only to one who has acquired wisdom.

I do not think that ר' יוסי הגלילי is arguing with the usual translation of the word זקן as referring to an elder. Rather, he is stressing the fact that an elder is called such because he has acquired wisdom (זה קנה) over the years by learning from life's experiences<sup>8</sup>. Thus, one who has acquired wisdom through Torah knowledge is called a זקן even though they might be young, and one who has not acquired wisdom would not be called a זקן even though they might be old.

All the above provides a very unique understanding of our Pasuk, ואברהם זקן בא בימים וה' ברך את אברהם. For the point of ר' יוסי הגלילי's interpretation is that the only real acquisition we make in life is the wisdom we gain. All other monetary acquisitions are fleeting and temporary, only wisdom is everlasting. As we grow older our physical strength wanes as physical pleasures become less satisfying. Most people as they grow older look back on the "good old days". Not so the wise. With old age, wisdom becomes deeper and clearer. The תלמיד חכם does not fear old age, but rather looks forward to the insight and perspective it provides. Fascinatingly the Gemoroh in Kedushin (פב.) makes the very same point and proves it from our Pasuk:

רבי נהוראי אומר מניח אני כל אומנות שבעולם ואיני מלמד את בני אלא תורה, שאדם אוכל משכרה בעולם הזה והקדשן קיימת לו לעולם הבא: ושאר כל אומנות אינן כן, כשאדם בא לידי חולי או לידי זקנה ... ואינו יכול לעסוק במלאכתו הרי הוא מת ברעב, אבל התורה אינה כן, אלא משמרתו מכל רע בנערותו, ונותנת לו אחרית ותקוה בזקנותו, בנערותו מהו אומר? (ישעיהו מ) וקויה ה' יחליפו כח, בזקנותו מה אומר? (תהלים צב) עוד ינובון בשיבה וכן הוא אומר באברהם אבינו: ואברהם זקן... וה' ברך את אברהם בכל.

---

3 As is stated in a previous Pasuk: (ישעיהו יב:ב) לא ישוויה: (יא) כִּי־טוֹבָה חֻקָּהּ מִפְּנִינִים וְכִלְי־הַפְּצִים

4 משנה מסכת אבות פרק ו משנה י

5 פסחים נד.

6 מסכתות קטנות מסכת אבות דרבי נתן הוספה ב לנוסחא א פרק ח

7 The Targum Yerushalmi thus translates the words בראשית ברא as בחוכמה ברא.

8 The Gemoroh in Kedushin (לג.) quotes רב יוחנן who mentions that he used to stand up for every elder, whether Jewish or not, simply because they had experienced so many challenges during their long life

The Gemoroh understands that the blessing that Avrohom was blessed with was that of זקן, the חכמת התורה for this can be called that which he truly acquired, זה קנה. It was his only true acquisition as it would continue to develop and deepen in his old age and remain intact in עולם הבא.

Taking this idea one step further, the כלי יקר explains the strange wording of בא בימים. After all, he asks, as one grows older he should be called יוצא מימים, as he is leaving days, not entering days. He explains that this is true only of one who has lived his days as a purely physical being. As the physical man grows old he leaves his best days behind him and should be accurately termed a יוצא מימים. However, a spiritual person, one who has acquired wisdom looks forward to his old age, he thus is called a בא בימים, entering the prime of his life<sup>9</sup>.

2. The commentaries question why the episode of finding a wife for Yitzchok is introduced with Avrohom's old age and blessings from Hashem. The obvious reason is that he feared not being alive to guide Yitzchok's choice of a wife. This was especially true due to Avrohom's wealth, as Yitzchok might be sought after in order to inherit his estate. Hence the Pasuk introduces this story with both Avrohom's advanced age and his material blessings.

According to that which we have written above we might propose a different answer. Avrohom warns Eliezer not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan and rather to travel hundreds of miles to his family. Avrohom must have felt that there was something very problematic with the character of the Cananim, but saw no such issue with Besuel and Lavan. This seems strange due to the fact that the family of Besuel and Lavan were idol worshipers<sup>10</sup>. The answer given<sup>11</sup> is the nature of their character flaws. The people of Canaan were immoral and בעלי תאוה. Avrohom could find no possible redeeming feature in their behavior. Indeed when בני ישראל conquer ארץ ישראל they are commanded to destroy the Cananim completely. However, Besuel and Lavan were idol worshipers. They sought out a spiritual force in their lives; they simply chose the wrong force. This was an intellectual error which could be corrected and channeled towards עבודה ה'<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, our Pasuk is explaining why Avrohom is about to issue his warning to Eliezer. He has reached old age and realizes the ultimate value of the wisdom of Torah like ר' נהוראי in the Gemoroh quoted above. He fully realizes the folly of living a purely physical existence. He relishes the blessings that his wisdom has brought him and cannot bear the thought of Yitzchok marrying into a family of the immoral Cananim.

3. Questions for further thought:

- a. In the following Pasuk the term זקן ביתו appears. Does this correlate to our understanding of זקן?
- b. Do you think there is a connection between Avrohom looking for a wife for Yitzchok and Sarah's recent passing?

---

9 The כלי יקר uses this idea to explain homiletically the Pasuk in (ז':) קהלת which teaches: אל־תאמר מָה הָיָה שְׁהַיָּמִים: הָרִאשֹׁנִים הָיוּ טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה פִּי לֹא מִחֻקָּה שְׁאַלְתָּ עֲלֵיָהּ: Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" because you are not asking this from wisdom. We usually explain the Pasuk to be teaching that it is not wise to lament the fact that our generation does not match the piety of previous generations. However, the כלי יקר explains it to mean that if one were to ask why were my younger days better than my elder years, it would reflect on his lack of wisdom.

10 The Midrash tells us that Eliezer would not enter the house of Besuel until they cleaned out the idols (פניתי את הבית) and Lavans תרפים were very important to him.

11 See R.S.R. Hirsch

12 One could thus explain the passage in the Haggadah which reads: מתחילה עובדי עבודה זרה היו אבותינו ועכשיו קרבנו המקום לעבודתו. Since we were already those who sought a 'higher' power we could be guided in the correct direction.