BS”D

Parshas Chayei Sara 5774

A Match for Yitzchok

By Rabbi Chaim Zev Citron

Imagine you lived over 3500 years ago. Now imagine you’re a *shadchan* (matchmaker). Avraham Avinu comes into your office and asks you for a list of candidates for his son Yitzchok. Your list might look something like this:

1. A righteous woman from Avraham’s family back in Charan
2. A woman from the family of Lot or Yishmael
3. One of the daughters of Avraham’s friends and allies, Aner, Eshkol, and Mamrei
4. A daughter of Avraham’s righteous servant Eliezer
5. A woman from a Canaanite family

Avraham looks at your list for a moment. He quickly crosses out option #5. He thinks for a moment, then crosses out option #4. He hesitates, then crosses out option #3. He gazes at option #2 for a while, then writes a big question mark next to it. Then his eyes light up and he underlines choice #1 and makes a big check next to it.

Now, as far as I know, Avraham didn’t actually go to a shadchan. But the choices on our fictitious list are actually what he had. Avraham made Eliezer swear not to take a Canaanite woman for Yitzchok and not to take Yitzchok out of Canaan. But what if the woman from Avraham’s family refused to leave her home and join Yitzchok in Canaan, asked Eliezer. Avraham said that he would then be free of his oath.

Rashi says that at that point, Eliezer could take a wife for Yitzchok from the daughters of Eshkol, Aner, or Mamrei. The Ramban strongly disagrees. Surely, Yitzchok could not marry a Canaanite woman! Although some claim that Eshkol el al were not of the seven Canaanite nations, the Ramban points to a passage (Breishis 14:13) “Mamrei, the Emorite (one of the seven Canaanite nations), the brother of Eshkol, the brother of Aner.” He goes on to quote the Midrash which says explicitly on the passage (24:3), “’Do not take a wife for my son from the Canaanite women in whose midst I dwell.’ He is commanded not to take the daughters of Aner, Eshkol, and Mamrei.” These specific women are referred to because Avraham was living in proximity to Aner el al. He lived “in their midst.”

The Ramban explains that Eliezer is free of the oath of finding a wife for Yitzchok if he fails to bring a wife home. Yitzchok must then find his own wife, Eliezer would no longer be responsible. Or perhaps it means Eliezer is free of the oath of taking a wife from “there” (Avraham’s immediate family) and should take a wife from the families of Lot or Yishmael. It’s interesting that Rashi himself, commenting on Eliezer’s statement to Rivkah’s parents that if they refuse to give their daughter, he will turn to the right or the left, says the right refers the woman of Yishmael and the left to the women of Lot.

The Maharal offers an excellent exposition of Rashi’s position. Eliezer did have the option of finding a woman from the families of Yishmael and Lot. But he also definitely had the option of taking the daughters of Aner et al.

When Avraham told Eliezer if the woman refused to come to Canaan, he was free of the oath, it referred to the words “in whose midst I dwell.” This refers specifically to the daughters of Aner etc. as the Midrash points out; the oath was that he couldn’t even take a daughter of Aner despite the fact that they were friendly to Avraham. Freedom from the oath meant that he *could* take a daughter of Aner etc. Of course, he still couldn’t take an ordinary Canaanite. But he could take a daughter of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamrei. In fact, there is a Midrash (57:3) that says that they were *tzidkaniyot*, righteous women The Maharal adds that the curse of Canaan did not apply to them. Hashem says he would bless those that blessed Avraham, and since Aner, Eshkol, and Marmei were Avraham’s friends and allies, they were blessed and not cursed.

There is a well-known interpretation explaining why under no circumstances was Yitzchok to marry a Canaanite woman (as opposed to Rashi’s view that it was theoretically possible for him to marry a daughter of Aner, Eshkol, or Mamrei):

The Canaanites had deeply-ingrained bad character traits. Even if a Canaanite woman had the right belief in the one G-d, there was an unfixable flaw in her character making marriage to Yitzchok utterly unacceptable.

But according to Rashi, this was not the case. A truly righteous person, a true *tzadeket*, could in theory marry Yitzchok. There is no such thing as a totally unfixable character. Even though the Canaanites as a whole were in fact morally flawed and had bad character traits, an individual could transcend that limitation and become a truly righteous person.

There are no Canaanites around today, but I think Rashi’s message is clear. An individual is not bound by the character of his ancestors or by values of the culture he or she grew up with. Each person can overcome these limitations. Each person can, through serious effort and struggle, achieve spiritual and moral goodness or even greatness. We must look to the ways of Torah to guide us in becoming truly good people. There are no limits.