

A-37

"DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF"

(Don't sell yourself cheap) (Shul)

Kammah - 1957
SC - 1961

A-37

This week's Sidra tells of the first business deal recorded in History. It involves a not-too-complicated affair, but the transaction is nevertheless an interesting one. Sarah had died, and Abraham was looking for a plot of ground where he could bury her. He approached the "BNEI CHEISS", the Hittites, and asked him them to sell him the "ME'ORAS HAMACHPELAH", that sepulchre which has been so highly revered in Jewish Tradition as the burial ground of the Patriarchs of Israel. Ephron, who was chief of the "AM HA'ARETZ", the technical name for the Hittite National Council, was, in fact, very gracious with this dignified stranger, Abraham. Indeed, Ephron sounds anxious to satisfy Abraham and get rid of the real estate. When Abraham offers Ephron 400 silver shekels, Ephron replies: אִישׁן דְּרַבִּי חָרֵץ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל (אִישׁן דְּרַבִּי חָרֵץ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל) - "Listen here, sir, a parcel of real estate worth a mere \$400 - what is that between people like you and me?" Ephron was certainly noble about the entire deal and we can rightly expect the Torah - and the Rabbis and Tradition - to give Ephron due credit for his kindness. If anything, the verdict of History should be that Ephron was a "good goy", a fine fellow.

And yet, surprisingly, our Rabbis thought the exact opposite. We are almost inclined to feel that Tradition was unfair to Ephron when the Rabbis bitinglly applied to him the verse from Proverbs: יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵבָב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַבִּי חָרֵץ - "It is a man who has an evil eye who hastens after riches". So that our Sages, who usually are blessed with such penetrating insight into human character and personality, suspected Ephron of having an "evil eye" and decided that he was no gentleman after all, but that he was a profiteer, a "NIVHAL LA'HON", a man who had no values other than money and profit. And we ask why, why did CHAZAL malign this man Ephron, who was willing to sell to our Father Abraham the MEORAS HAMACHPELAH without haggling about details, and why did they think him a NIVHAL LAHON, a profiteer, and an ISH RA AYIN, a man with an evil eye?

But lest we jump to rash conclusions about the fairness of CHAZAL, let us at once concede that they were 100% right. Our Rabbis were not the kind of people who haul witnesses before an Investigating Committee and, without thinking, accuse them of being disloyal. Our Sages had very good reason for accusing Ephron of being a NIVHAL LEHON, a money-man, and an ISH RA AYIN, a man with an evil eye.

To understand this accusation by our Rabbis, we must remeber that the burial vault known as MEORAS HAMACHPELAH, which Ephron was so eager to sell for 400 shekels, was actually a hallowed place. It was more than just a quaint two-story cave. For, according to Tradition, in this cave there were laid to rest the two first human beings, created by G-d out of earth and dust. Adam and Eve were there buried, the Adam and Eve who talked with G-d, the Adam and Eve who were placed in the Garden of Eden, the Adam and Eve who were the ancestors of all humanity, the Adam and Eve who, though they later sinned, were yet holy and pious people. The MEORAS HAMACHPELAH was more than a monument to a man and his wife, it was mute testimony to the fact that two people once talked to G-d, that G-d created Man and found interest in his affairs. And yet Ephron, knowing the great and unequalled value of the MEORAS HAMACHPELAH, was willing to sell it in a quick deal for 400 silver shekels! Yes, a scoundrel he was, for he was NIVHAL LEHON, primarily interested in making a fast shekel; and, most important, an ISH RA AYIN, an evil-eyed man, for he deliberately underestimated the value of the MEORAS HAMACHPELAH, the greatness of Adam and Eve, the testimony to G-d's creation of and love for man. When a merchant appraises or estimates a piece of goods, he does so with his eye -we say he has a "sharp eye" - and this Ephron, because of his money-madness, did not use the eye of his mind to properly estimate the value of the Meoras Hamachpelah; he was RA AYIN, evil-eyed, his eye looked for the Shekel, not for respect and sentiment and holiness. He committed the sin of underestimation.

How often it happens that people underestimate what they have - and such people are usually either evil or foolish. Only a few years ago some Arab bedouins entered a cave in the deserts of Judea and found earthern jars which contained some old scrolls. The Arabs thought nothing of them and, after causing considerable damage to them, sold them for a mere pittance. The foolish Arab underestimated the Scrolls, for they are now known as the famous Sukenik Scrolls, the most ancient copies of the Book of Isaiah, and some works never before known to us.

Or perhaps the greatest example of underestimation and its consequences is that of some American Indian tribes who lived on an island which never seemed to amount to much. These Indians therefore decided to sell it to the White Men for the grand price of \$24.00. History proves that they somewhat underestimated the value of that island - for that island, which they estimated as being worth \$24 is Manhattan, the island we are on right now. Today's Haftorah records a gross underestimation: David had many sons, most of them of royal bearing and proud aristocratic assertion with good military education. But one of his sons, named Solomon, kept out of the public eye and away from the princely parties. And when David was on his deathbed, his sons began to wonder who would succeed him. David himself had promised the crown to Solomon - but the others dismissed him as a "Yeshiva Bochur", a "batlan", an ivory-tower scholar who could never make out well in the practical world of politics. One brother, in fact, Adomiyahu by name, declared himself King while David was yet alive. Others were to follow. How they underestimated that quiet, shy young Solomon! For he was to establish the greatest Jewish Kingdom ever. What a sad case of underestimation.

People are sometimes inclined to underestimate the potentials of this synagogue. They dismiss the possibilities of growing in a neighborhood where so few Jews reside. If anyone thinks so, my friends, it is a gross underestimation. First of all, an underestimation in numbers - I wonder how many of you realize that in a 15 block radius over 4,000 Jews live in peace and harmony. There's something to exploit! And not only quantity, but quality too is plentiful. Let us not underestimate our fellow-Jews - they can perform wonders!

Or, turning from adults to children: how we Americans underestimate the children! We guard them and protect them and coddle them and we're under the impression that any little draught will blow them over! They must not study too much - because they have to have lots of fresh air. Not too much Hebrew school - because we dare not overburden their small minds. We shield them from the harsh realities of life, because it might frighten them and make neurotics out of them. And how we underestimate them! Those children are, in reality sturdy, healthy, intelligent, and they can take a hundred times as much as we give them. This Rabbi has had experience in teaching children in Talmud Torah, high school boys and girls, young men and women in college, and adult groups of various sorts. And it is my firm and unshaken opinion that they can bear a lot more than the adults. We talk baby-talk to them when we should be speaking to them intelligently. We adults become children in their presence when we should urge them to be adults in our presence. Underestimation!

But not only should we be wary of RA AYIN, of underestimation of others, but we should be aware of looking at ourselves with the RAAYIN. How often a Rabbi hears words like this: "I'm matured, I'm set in my ways, too rigid to change. I Can't turn religious at my age, I haven't got the education for it, the patience for it, the ability for it." What a terrible case of self-underestimation. I assert that such people have less faith in themselves than religion has in them. I maintain that every Jew is filled and brimming with great potentialities which he himself is unaware of. I believe that every Jew can start, at any age, to put on Tefillin, to learn Hebrew, to study the Chumosh and the Talmud. It is all a matter of proper evaluation and estimation. And if there is anything that this week's Sidra, according to the Rabbis, teaches us, it is: DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF. Don't look into the mirror of your own personality with a RA AYIN. Don't commit the sin of Ephron on yourselves. Remember that you are created BETZELEM ELOHIM, in the image of G-d.

With the proper respect for himself, with the proper evaluation for his own abilities and estimation of his own capacities, each one of us can, and we pray - will, grow to the stature of an Abraham and tower above the Ephrons of life.

Benediction: יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ - O G-d, save us from the Foot of Pride and teach us sincere humility; But save us also from the being trampled by Underestimation, so that we may offer to you our best instincts & noblest abilities.

1. Sidra: first record business-deal:

- Sarah dead... $\text{וְיָרַד אֶת אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם}$... $\text{וַיָּבֵר אֶת אֶתְרָא$ as head $\text{וַיָּבֵר אֶת אֶתְרָא}$
- elaborate Oriental reference, subtlety of bargaining
- Abraham: 400 shekels for אֶתְרָא
- Ephron: $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶתְרָא בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַבְרָהָם לְסָרָה וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶתְרָא בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַבְרָהָם לְסָרָה וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶתְרָא בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַבְרָהָם לְסָרָה$
- If anything, History should have good word for Ephron...

2. Surprisingly: Tradition opposite: Ephron = וְיָרַד אֶתְרָא וַיָּבֵר אֶתְרָא

- No gentleman, but profiteer - a greedy, malicious person...
- why malign him? ... Isn't it unfair?

3. To understand Sages: אֶתְרָא a hallowed place ... Adam's cave

- First creatures g-d... conversed with Him...
- אֶתְרָא more than burial plot... antiquarian's find... museum piece ...
- was hallowed ground because great-grandparents...
bee. $\text{וַיִּשְׁמַע אֶתְרָא}$ were symbols to maintain divine
source man's soul, inspirations.....
- so that Tradition condemned Ephron not
bee. charged Abr. too much - but too little !!

→ UNDERESTIMATION

- Ephron: sharp-eye for a fact-shekel ... money-minded...
more interested in his bank-account than in monument
man's spirit, true greatness.

4. How often we expect that - UNDERESTIMATE

- 1948 - Arab Bedouins - Dead Sea Scrolls.
- American Indians - Manhattan - #24.
- Hatiorch: shyest, most retiring David's sons
is Solomon - Admijah, others are brash.
They UNDERESTIMATE Solomon.

→ we UNDERESTIMATE our own children ... can take much more...
 (that's why we're so far behind Russians = 6 times more
~~the~~ physical ed. than math teachers)

44

5. Religiously, too, we suffer from EPHRONITIS ...

- "too late to learn how to be a good Jew" ...
 ADULT EDUCATION: seder, ENID, 2007, Hebrew, Philosophy.
- BUILDING CAMPAIGN

6. Let us learn proper perspective in
 evaluating selves as well as others.
 Let us use UNDEREST. - spiritual
 potential of our faith.

Let us grow stature of Abraham,
 & tower above Ephraim of life.